THE
LONDON READER
of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.
[ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.]

No. 1458.—VOL. LVI.] FOR THE WEEK ENDING APRIL 11, 1891. [PRICE ONE PENNY.

[ALWYNNE PATTED THE GREAT, SMOOTH HEADS OF THE BOARHOUNDS, AND QUESTIONED THE MEN ABOUT THEM.]

A GIRL'S HEART.

CHAPTER III.

A SULLEN sky and sea met them the next morning; the gale had spent its fury during the night, but it had not quite gone.

Alwynne left her cabin early. She had peeped into her mother's apartment, heard her breathe evenly and softly, and was reassured by a whisper from Marie that "madame" had slept all night, and was of a certainty much better.

This done, after she had given Marie some stringent orders to get all the rest she could, and to be sure to eat some breakfast, Alwynne went on a voyage of discovery to see if Paul were better.

Despite Marie's terms of opprobrium, Paul was a good, faithful servant, and Alwynne liked him.

She saw him in the distance talking to a another man, evidently a fellow-servant, and Alwynne stopped to say a few kind words to Paul, and then gave way to sincere admiration for the two magnificent dogs that were leashed together, and held by his companion.

She had almost a mania for all animals, and these two splendid creatures appealed to her immediately.

She patted their great smooth heads, with their sharp pricked ears, and questioned the man about them.

They were boarhounds of a rare breed, he told her, and belonged to his master, the Earl of Taunton and Torre; and, as he spoke, the man looked up, and put his finger to his cap.

A third man had approached, and the dogs were leaping about him, and baying in a deep and somewhat alarming tone.

"You like them?" Lord Taunton said to Alwynne, as they exchanged bows. Then, involuntarily, 'By Jove! you have plenty of courage! Few women will go near them, though they are quite harmless; but they must disappear now. Be off with them, Chadwick. I got permission with great difficulty," he went on, as the two servants disappeared, "to have them up here for a run early in the morning, and promised they were to go below immediately anyone came on deck."

He had turned, and was walking with her quite naturally.

"Oh! I hope you did not send them away because of me?" Alwynne said. She, too, accepted his companionship quite naturally

It would have been difficult to analyse or describe the sort of mutual ease which came upon them both. They were not in the least surprised to find themselves walking together. They spoke of the weather; and he, scanning the sky and sea, prognosticated another storm.

Alwynne laughed slightly.

"I am horribly selfish; but I think I am glad for bad weather."

"You like having the deck for yourself?"

"Yes. And, besides, I like the wind and the rushing sea. I cannot understand how all those people can stay below. I should stifle!" She shuddered as she spoke, and he followed suit.

They had walked up to the fore part of the ship, and were leaning against the white

painted rails that separated them from the helm and the bows.

The salt wind stung her delicate cheeks sharply.

"This is too rough for you!" he said; and there was something authoritative in his manner.

She was to him a marvel—the first girl he had known who would not have taken some precaution to shield her skin from the wind and sun—and such a skin!

"I am expecting my child," Alwynne said, as they repaced the deck. "I hope he is well enough to get up."

"He was nearly dressed when I went to see him ten minutes ago."

She looked at him for a moment, and he read pleasure at his remembrance of the boy in that look.

"He does not seem strong enough to travel alone," Taunton said, after a pause.

"He is going to fight his way in the world, poor boy! That will be a much harder journey than this one!"

They had come to a standstill—this time aft, and Alwynne was leaning easily and gracefully against one of the posts that supported the awning.

"The world is not such a hard place!" he said.

"It depends on circumstances," Alwynne replied.

They were talking commonplace, ordinary conventional truisms. He knew it, but he intended to cling to them so long as she would answer in that clear, sweet voice of hers, and look at him so easily.

He felt that this pleasant intercourse was not destined to last long. At present he saw that the unconventionality of the proceedings had not forced itself upon her; and it was this ignorance, or perhaps one should say this sort of innocent forgetfulness, that appealed to him chiefly.

He had not troubled to inquire what there was in this very trivial interchange of speech with an unknown girl that gave him pleasure. He was content to know the pleasure was there, and it was a sufficiently novel experience to be not only startling, but enjoyable.

Alwynne was thinking over the simple history of privation and sorrow that her gentle womanliness had succeeded in wooing from Basil Canning's lips.

Yes, the world was very hard to fight under some circumstances. She gave a sigh, unconsciously, and the man beside her looked at her keenly, critically. He saw she was deep in thought, and had almost forgotten his presence. His dark blue eyes dwelt on her fair flower like face, and their stern, keen look melted into a strange tenderness as he gazed.

Surely she was more beautiful than any woman ever yet born! More fair and exquisite than all he had ever met, even than that one who——. His face clouded black as night. In an instant all his prejudice, his hatred, his wrong, rushed back on him. He stiffened unconsciously, and was about to utter a summary farewell, and pass on and leave her, when Alwynne spoke to him.

"I am sorry for that boy," she said, as though she was speaking out her thoughts. "I wish I could do something for him; but I am so helpless, I am so useless!"

His lips contracted suddenly. Her simple, regretful words had disarmed him again.

"I fancy your ministrations of yesterday are never likely to be forgotten!" he said, quietly.

"Oh!" Alwynne made a movement with her little ungloved hand. "Oh!" she said, almost bitterly, "I don't mean that sort of use. I mean real, definite service; but that is where life is hard to some people, especially to girls. I don't know why girls are born at all! According to my mother, they——" and then Alwynne suddenly stopped. As by a lightning flash she seemed to see the enormity, the awfulness, of her present offence. What had she done? What was she doing? Where had been her thoughts, her pride, that it did not prevent her from acting as she had done?

Her delicate cheeks flushed crimson, and then she grew very, very pale. What must this man think of her?—so free, so ready to accept his aid, so easy in her manner, so confidential in her speech? Alwynne felt suddenly chilled, though it was not fear of her mother's annoyance that brought that feeling. It was vexation and regret for herself.

Unconsciously her hand stole up to her cap, and she pulled the veil from it down close over her face. It was the action of an instant, but the man understood it thoroughly, just as he had translated the sudden dawning look in her beautiful eyes, and the quick change of colour. With a tact that had something of tenderness in it Lord Taunton spoke hurriedly.

"Here comes our little friend! He does not look as though he could make his way very well. I will give him a helping hand." He stopped but a moment, as he was moving away. "A man can sometimes do what a girl cannot!" and with that he passed on, and left her alone.

She stood very still. She was grateful to him—grateful in a vague sort of way—not only for that promise conveyed in his last words, but for the delicate sympathy which she understood better, perhaps, than he was well aware of. She saw him walk towards the boy, and in that moment she took her opportunity and slipped away.

She sat in her cabin, and leaned her head against the stuffy velvet cushions. Marie had seen her come in, and was soon flattering about her with tender solicitude, afraid at first that the girl was going to be ill. Alwynne reassured her quickly.

"I am only cold," she said; and then, with a faint smile, "I think I will take mamma's advice, and lie here and read."

The plan pleased Marie, for she loved to have the girl under her wing, and she put the cushions comfortable, and covered the slender young form with the softest and warmest wraps. Alwynne was soothed by these gentle ministrations. The deck had suddenly grown distasteful to her. She was quivering yet from the shock she had received, when she had all at once discovered herself drifting into an intimate conversation with a man she had never seen before in all her life.

Every now and then her face and hands would burn with the rush of hot blood that coursed through her veins at memory of what she had done; and she determined that, whether she liked it or not, she would stay in the cabin as much as possible for the rest of the voyage.

She eat her breakfast, and tried to read her book, and then she grew restless. She remembered that one of the portholes of her deck state-room just looked out over the corner where she and Basil had sat. Perhaps he was there now, all alone. She drew back the little curtain. Yes, Basil was there, wrapped up carefully in a rug, not hers this time, and, beside him, sitting sideways in a chair, leaning towards the boy, was her late companion.

The two were talking earnestly. She watched them carefully. The boy's delicate face was flushed, and he seemed to be excited. The other's face looked curiously dark beside Basil's fairness; but Alwynne declared to herself it had a rare attraction about it—something she realised in all its strength, but which she could not define. She was glad to see those two together. She felt, she scarcely knew why, that Basil would not need her to look after him and be companionable now that he had found a better friend than she could be.

The day wore away wearily enough to Alwynne. As the afternoon waned she felt a longing to go out. She was nearly stifled in her cabin. It was the dinner hour, and the deck would be free even of the few who had ventured to come upon it.

She wrapped her cloak about her, veiled herself carefully, and stepped out. The first strong gust of wind revived her, though it nearly blew her down, and she started on her difficult walk with a sigh of relief.

Her mountain of annoyance of imaginary disagreeables, that might possibly accrue from her yesterday's and that morning's forgetfulness, melted into a very small molehill.

As she struggled up and down the deck it was wonderful how much better she felt—not quite at ease with herself, perhaps, but certainly better.

She went to her mother's state-room after her walk, and found Mrs. Brabrante able to sit up and discuss, with no mean appetite, the dinner Marie had set out as daintily as possible before her.

Mrs. Brabante was busy reading the list of passengers through a pair of gold eyeglasses, of which she had no real need, for a keener or handsomer pair of eyes than hers it would have been hard to find; but, then, the use of glasses was almost as graceful a trick as the use of a fan, and tended to bring into play and sight the shape and colour of a beautiful hand.

She gave her daughter a glance as she came in; it was comprehensive and swift. Alwynne's suddenly freshened mind and spirit grew cold and dull again beneath that glance.

She understood it so thoroughly it hardly needed the accompaniment of the printed list to give it translation.

"She had seen his name," the girl said to herself, and the old contemptuous look crept over her lips.

The mother, as she folded up her eyeglasses and put down the paper, was thinking,—

"Taunton and Torre! So he is going home at last. What a chance! What a position! By this time he has learnt forgetfulness. He must have done, or why should he be going back?"

She looked at Alwynne critically while she eat her chicken, and there was a great rush of satisfaction through her mind.

"Yes, the girl was more than beautiful. Her graceful head was made for a coronet, her slender throat for historical jewels. There were few men who could stand the witchery of such a face as Alwynne's, particularly under some circumstances," and Mrs. Brabante's mind determined that a sea voyage was included in these circumstances.

She eat her dinner and talked to Alwynne in her slow, measured, artificial manner. She was an exceedingly handsome woman. There was a shadowy likeness between Alwynne and herself. It lay in the delicate cut features, in the height and form—perhaps, in her youth, the mother had had the same exquisite skin; but the great dreamy eyes, the ever varying colour and expression in them, the soft, tender look that crept about the beautiful lips, these were Alwynne's alone. They could never have dwelt on Louise Brabante's cold, hard face.

"The doctor has been to see me. He is most attentive, quite a charming young man! He tells me we shall have fine weather to-morrow, and that I may, perhaps, venture on deck for an hour or so."

Alwynne said nothing. She was playing absently with the fringe of a shawl near. Her mother lifted her eyes to the girl. She had enjoyed her dinner. She was full of pleasurable intentions. She was more than satisfied with the prospect her imagination raised up before her; but now, as she looked at Alwynne, she frowned.

Of late she had noticed this cold, contemptuous expression on the lovely young face; of late, once or twice, an uneasy suspicion of what lay beneath the girl's languid indifference had forced itself most disagreeably upon her.

Her lips drew themselves into a thin line. She had no intention of conceding one iota of her will to any living soul without some insuperable powers compelled her to do so, and certainly Alwynne had none of these at her command.

"You look pale and tired! You must go to bed, Alwynne."

"I am not tired, mamma."

"Then you must be ill," Mrs. Brabante said, conveying her wine to her mouth in a most graceful fashion. "It is not natural for girls of your young age to be so pale."

Alwynne flushed. She fretted beneath this tone.

"Dear mamma," she said, with a laugh that was meant to be light, "I am not a baby!"

Mrs. Brabante examined her shapely fingers, with their burden of jewelled rings.

"That is precisely what you are, Alwynne," she said, pleasantly. "A baby, a mere child, who does not know what is good for herself. Marie, go and undress mam'selle, and kindly bathe her face with the water I carry in my casket."

Alwynne bit her lip; at that moment the resemblance between mother and daughter was stronger.

"I can put myself to bed, thank you, mamma!" she said, coldly and proudly, "and you know I object to use any face lotions or preparations. If my skin intends to turn brown or black it shall do so with no hindrance from me. I am perfectly indifferent about it!"

She had never spoken to her mother like this before.

Mrs Brabante looked at her in amazement, and much inward dismay and anger.

"I do not think that is quite the way in which a child should address its mother," she said, coldly.

Alwynne paused at the door.

"I am very sorry, mother!" she said; and her voice was full of trouble, "very sorry!" she added. Then she turned, "Don't you see how it is with me? I am so tired of all these—these preparations. I am tired of thinking of nothing but my face and my appearance. There must be some other life better than this. There must be some way of spending one's days more profitably than by——"

She stopped. She could not speak the burning words that rushed through her mind. They were bad enough to think—they were worse to speak. It was not possible, indeed, to frame the thoughts into words to adequately express her contempt and abhorrence for the sort of life she was compelled to live.

Mrs. Brabante met her daughter's eye, and smiled. There was more of a sneer in the expression than a smile.

"You are giving me a new view of your character to-night, Alwynne," she said, in that light tone that always jarred on the girl. "Hitherto I must confess, my dear, I have been somewhat perturbed by your very evident indifference to all forms of religion. I see now I have wronged you!"

"Yes, mother," Alwynne said, with emotion. She turned her face away to hide the tears that would spring to her eyes. "Yes, mother, you have wronged me; and—and," with a slight pause, "you are wronging me now. You know what is in my heart, but you will not understand!"

Mrs. Brabante laughed good-humouredly enough.

"I should have enough to do if I tried to fathom and piece out the workings of a girl's hysterical, romantic mind. My dear Alwynne, you are like the child who cried for the moon. Because you have no real cause for trouble you must needs make one. You have everything you want. What girl has more than you? Your life is one of luxury and perpetual comfort. Your clothes are the best to be had, your education has been superb, your health is satisfactory, your appearance attractive; and yet with all this you," Mrs. Brabante laughed, "you are miserable, and you have yearnings for something or other, you don't quite know what! All this is strange to you, but exceedingly natural to me. It is a form of illness which attacks all emotional young folk. It has to be gone through just as one goes through the measles or the whooping-cough, but it leaves no trace behind. I give you a few weeks in London, Alwynne, and you will have forgotten all about these morbid, religious desires. You will have no more yearnings to join the Salvation Army or some such organisation, and you will declare that a hat from Verron's is, after all, more becoming than the hallelujah bonnet! Now to more mundane things! Have you had some dinner? No? Ah! I thought not. Marie, see to this, please, and be sure mam'selle retires at once. I would make you sleep here to-night, Alwynne, but the doctor is coming in to chat with me for half-an-hour, so——"

And so Alwynne escaped. She went to her cabin, and flung herself down on her berth. There were tears in her eyes, but they did not roll down her cheeks. Her heart was aching; she felt sick and tired. What use to kick against the pricks? What use to struggle or to hope for a change in her surroundings? It was so true a great deal of what her mother had said, she had so much. Compare her life with the boy outside?

Why, there was no comparison, and yet he was richer than she, for he had that priceless treasure—the knowledge of true sister's love and truer sympathy to hug to his breast, and give him comfort and strength.

She shivered a little. She had never seemed more lonely than she did to-night. She had never realised the gulf that stretched between herself and her mother so completely, so utterly.

Marie came in by-and-by. Her brown eyes were very tender. She was full of pretty words over the girl. She chattered volubly as she brushed the beautiful hair.

She knew there was something wrong; but she asked no questions. She spoke of her own affairs, and she brought a light to Alwynne's face, as she told her how Basil Canning had caught hold of her and questioned most eagerly for Alwynne's health.

"*Un très joli garçon, mais d'une faiblesse!*"

And with little anecdotes and broken sentences, which always amused Alwynne, Marie undressed her for the night.

The Frenchwoman was never tired of extolling the loveliness of her charge; there was always some new beauty, some fresh charm, to her, and to-night she just gathered the slender form in her strong arms, and kissed the soft curls tenderly.

"*Mon ange!*" she said, as she whisked away, with an authoritative "*dors bien alors!*"

Alwynne lay staring about her cabin. She had got used to the motion, and to-night the sea was calmer, and they were going fast into fine weather.

Outside she could hear the tramping of feet up and down, for it was early yet, and the moon had brought up some stragglers.

There were voices just beyond the wall of her room. She could hear them talking almost distinctly, but she did not listen, her thoughts claimed her attention; but all at once she seemed to wake from her hazy dream.

It was the boy's voice she heard, full of gratitude in every note.

"Good-night, my lord!" he was saying. "How good you are! How can I thank you! I——"

"Never mind thanks, my lad!" the other voice answered; "or, if you must be grateful, thank your pretty angel, for she deserves it! By the way, did you ask, is she ill?"

Alwynne's heart beat a little quicker. There was something pleasant to her in the interest that rang in his voice.

She scarcely heard the boy's answer; she was waiting for the other to speak again.

"That is good! I am glad! I was afraid she might have taken cold; it was almost too rough for her yesterday. You are going, really? This is your best way. Good-night!"

Alwynne closed her eyes. That firm, vigorous, good salutation sounded like a pleasant note of music. She heard a chair scrape the deck, and knew Lord Taunton was sitting back again.

The scent of his cigar floated through the open porthole. The pacers up and down had gone away. It seemed to Alwynne as though he and she were alone. In a dreamy sort of way she seemed to derive pleasure from this thought, and by soft degrees the cabin with its swaying movement passed from her eyes, and she had forgotten her trouble in a deep, dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER IV.

Five days of the voyage had gone. The weather had grown steadily better; the sun had come out, and given a decided touch of warmth along with its brilliancy at noontide. The atmosphere was delicious, spring beaming on every breeze, whispering of the golden summer that was not far off now.

The deck was crowded. It looked like an impromptu hospital, with its rows of long chairs, each bearing a bemuffled and berugged figure.

With the fine weather had come back health and strength, and laughter was the order of the day.

Everyone was more or less acquainted with the personal appearance of everyone on board.

Lord Taunton was a never-failing source of interest, though he was voted very stiff and unsociable; and it was noted that he kept exclusively to his party.

The distinguished woman very like the Empress Eugenie, who sat enthroned with her sables about her, and the fur rugs surrounding her, as though she were indeed a queen, and the tall, slender, graceful girl, whom someone declared was beautiful, but whose face was always shrouded in an extra thick veil, and whose chief occupation when not reading was talking and walking with a delicate, flaxen-haired boy, whom the ubiquitous somebody had further declared was not of this party, but was travelling alone.

Mrs. Brabante was exceedingly well pleased that it should be generally imagined that the Earl of Taunton was of the same party as herself.

She had managed to make his acquaintance quite easily. Her quick brain had seen immediately she came on deck that the young man whom she knew well by sight was desirous of becoming acquainted; and it came about, somehow quite naturally, that they should sit and chat together easily.

She knew the man she had to deal with, though as far removed from a snob as the sun is from the earth. Taunton was nevertheless an Englishman and aristocrat, and by nature first, and education afterwards, he would be impressed almost altogether by a stranger's manner, bearing, and surroundings.

Alwynne stayed in her room all that bright, sunny day. She had some letters to write, and her head ached, she told her mother.

Mrs. Brabante shrugged her shoulders, and said nothing. She knew that twenty-four hours' confinement was more than Alwynne could stand, and she was quite prepared for the girl's silent appearance beside her chair early the following morning.

Alwynne turned a little pale behind her veil as she heard her mother laughing and talking to someone.

She acknowledged the introduction to Lord Taunton with the merest and coldest bend of her head, and then she sat down and began to read.

Her mother made no effort to draw her into the conversation. She and Lord Taunton were deep on some political questions.

"Alwynne prefers poetry to politics," she said, laughingly.

Alwynne leant back in her chair. She had declined Lord Taunton's offers to wrap her rug about her very courteously, but coldly.

"I shall go for a walk presently," she had said.

She tried to centre her thoughts on her book, but her ears would wait for his voice, and she found her ears following his words eagerly.

Mrs. Brabante was a remarkably clever

woman. There was no subject of conversation she could not take her share in, and worthily too. She read everything; she followed every public matter of interest; she had travelled all over the globe, was a splendid linguist, and had a keen and caustic wit.

Taunton was interested, attracted, impressed, just as she meant him to be. He found himself dwelling persistently on these two beautiful women, who bore so unmistakably the air of birth and breeding that defined the women of his world.

He was drawn out of his sombre thoughts by their influence, by the mother's brilliant individuality, the girl's silent, gentle loveliness.

Three days had gone by, and between Mrs. Brabante and himself was established the most cordial relations. They seemed to have known one another all their lives. Taunton had rarely responded to a friendship so readily as he had done to this one. He was full of admiration for this clever woman, with her clear head and judgment.

"What a statesman is lost in you," he said to her, laughingly, one late afternoon.

It was this fifth day; on the morrow they would be at Queenstown, and the day following they would land.

"Lord —— has often paid me the same compliment," Mrs. Brabante said, echoing his laugh; "but, somehow, I have never found myself quite ready to regret the mistake of my sex."

Hugo looked out over the moving water; the sun was beginning to set. He was growing more interested and puzzled each day. Of course, it was impossible for him to lead the conversation into any groove that might, perhaps, enlighten him as to the status and position of his more than pleasant acquaintance; but every now and then Mrs. Brabante let fall some word that only tended to increase his perplexity.

She had spoken now of one of England's greatest politicians, and it was more than evident that there had been an intimate friendship between herself and this man.

On the other hand, she seemed to have few friends among the fashionable women of London, but this was explained by her long absence from England.

"Miss Brabante will be presented this season, I suppose?" he said, now changing the subject, as he perceived Alwynne's figure moving to and fro in the distance, with that subtle grace which seemed to touch him at every turn.

Mrs. Brabante closed her book, keeping one finger between the pages.

"Well, I am undecided," she said, slowly. "I know it is a strange thing for a nineteenth century mother to say, Lord Taunton; but, do you know, I shirk a London season for my child. I suppose I cannot hope to keep her always to myself," with a sort of wistful note in the voice, which was most effective; "but I cannot help being a little selfish, and I dread thrusting Alwynne into the fierce rush that life is in a great city. Perhaps you understand a little what I mean, Lord Taunton?"

"I think," the young man answered, in a low voice, "I understand entirely, Mrs. Brabante."

His eyes were on Alwynne's face now. She was coming towards them; she was laughing and talking to Basil Canning. How fair and young and innocent she looked! His heart throbbed and contracted as he gazed at her. Oh! the mother was right. Such a flower must not be flung into the furnace of fashion to be scorched and singed—burnt, perhaps. Who could tell?

He rose to his feet, with a word of excuse to Mrs. Brabante, and went towards the girl. He felt a thrill almost of jealousy for the fair, delicate boy who seemed to win all her smiles.

Why was she cold, and silent, and stiff with him? What had he done that she should make such a difference between him and Basil? He could scarcely believe she was the same girl who had clung to his arm in the wind and rain, and answered him in a bright, laughing voice.

Mrs. Brabante watched him go with intense satisfaction.

"It works well," she said to herself, "and it is she who has done it. Her very sullenness and coldness is her greatest magnet. She could not have done better if she were the cleverest woman in the world! Taunton and Torre! The dream is almost too good to be true!"

Alwynne flushed, and then paled, but she could not refuse his invitation to walk. Basil, obeying a smiling gesture from Mrs. Brabante, went to fulfil some errand, and they were alone.

They walked up and down in silence, and then stood, as they had done that second morning of their acquaintance, leaning against the rails at the bow.

Taunton waited for her to speak, but she seemed dumb—cold, proud, and dumb, like some beautiful statue. A wild longing came over him to suddenly seize those little hands, and force her eyes to look into his. She had not met his gaze once of late.

"Your mother has given me permission to count myself as one of her friends, and call upon her in London," he said when he spoke. "May I also consider I have the honour of your permission added to hers?"

"I have no permission to give!" Alwynne said, coldly, and with an imperceptible pause. "I have no friends, Lord Taunton!"

His face flushed.

"I think I understand you consider me presumptuous—too hasty. You do not permit yourself to accept friends so easily, Miss Brabante. I must ask your pardon," he said.

Was it he who spoke thus—he, Taunton and Torre?—the man who was renowned for his imperious nature—his proud, haughty reserve? Could it possibly be he who had sued for pardon from this unknown girl?

A faint thrill of surprise communicated itself to him, but—but it was not the feeling paramount in his mind.

It would have been difficult, indeed, to have analysed the exact nature of his heart at this moment.

Perhaps a sort of dogged determination to force this girl to bend to his will was the principal of all.

Alwynne had flushed as he spoke, but her veil was too thick to let him see this change in her face; his proud contrition touched her deeply.

She felt she was wronging him by her manner, yet a glance at her handsome mother—complacent and triumphant at the, to her, fast approaching success of her worldly desires—chilled all warm impulses in the girl's breast.

"I have nothing to forgive," she said, in the same cold fashion, and she moved on a few steps.

Taunton moved with her. Her coldness tried him beyond endurance. He was drawn out of himself. He forgot the past, forgot his shame and sorrow—forgot even his pride in the passionate impatience and intoxication that this girl's silent indifference aroused in him.

"What has changed you?" he asked, almost fiercely beneath his breath, as they walked down the deck in the fast growing twilight.

Alwynne's heart beat to suffocation. It was so hard to have to fight with him when every nerve in her body, every pulse within her, every breath she drew, seemed to be regulated by him.

She had had many painful moments of late in her life, but they had been theoretical, rather than practical, in their pain. They had been moments of uncomfortable thought, of unconscious contempt, of sorrow, for the chasm that yawned daily more black and big between her mother and herself; but now the pain and the trouble was going to be very different—something more real, something greater than she had imagined, would be possible.

Against the hard thoughts her contempt had raised up for him were the softer ones that would come—sensations and strange emotions so sweet as to bewilder her young brain.

She had seen the change in his face these last few days. Her woman's heart read the meaning in his eyes. She did not need her mother's radiant expression to translate it for her.

But up to this moment Alwynne had steeled herself in contempt. She had credited him bitterly with all the meaner motives that sometimes actuate a man.

"I have a pretty face. He is dull, I am an amusement. Perhaps he is poor, as so many of these old known families are, and he fancies I have money. He is piqued because I do not speak. Perhaps—perhaps, mamma has hinted, as she alone can do, that I am sentimental! He imagines already I love him!"

So her thoughts had run wildly in the seclusion of her cabin. She encouraged them. She wanted to think badly of him.

She wished she had never seen him. She longed for land, and the day that would separate him from her sight.

It seemed to the girl's wounded pride that he must see into her mother's mind—must understand her manœuvres—must regard her (Alwynne) as what she really was—a slave, put up for sale to the highest bidder.

But now, as he spoke to her so earnestly, with that strange, deep tone thrilling her, and making her trembling, somehow she knew that she had wronged him. His whole heart was made clear to her, as it were. He was not desirous of amusing himself. He had no thought of her probable fortune. He was innocent of her mother's worldly nature. He was full of one thought only—to break through the ice of her reserve, and win her back to those few happy moments when she had shown herself to him in all the grace and beauty of her sweet, girlish character.

She hesitated. She knew not what to say to him, and when she was about to frame some words the Captain approached, Lord Taunton attracting his immediate attention, and, murmuring a hurried excuse, Alwynne moved away.

* * * * * *

Basil Canning had spoken often of a cousin who would come to meet him at Liverpool; and when the tug came alongside the steamer the boy excitedly pointed out this cousin to Alwynne. They were standing a little apart, she and Basil. Her mother, regal-looking in her furs, with her cold, proud face, colder and harder than usual, was giving her servants a dozen different directions at one and the same time.

Alwynne shivered as she looked at her mother.

"She will never forgive me—never, never!" she said to herself. Out loud she spoke some hurried thoughts. "Basil, you will write to me. You will not forget me?"

"Forget you, forget you!" the boy could hardly utter the words. "As long as I live I shall worship you. If I could only let you know how much, but I am such a poor, humble friend."

"Yet you are all I have," Alwynne thought to herself. Her hand clung closer to his boyish one. It was so true. She had no friends—of all her school companions not one remained. She had thought they would have clung to her. They seemed to love her, but since her school-days, they had all vanished. She had made no new friends, none until she had met Basil; and, somehow, her whole heart had gone out to him suddenly, striking the keynote of a sympathy which would be as lasting as it was mutual.

The boy saw a great change in his beautiful friend this morning. She looked as though she had suffered some great agony of mind or body. And this was what had really happened. Alwynne shivered again and again as she caught the sound of her mother's

voice. The remembrance of the scene in her mother's room the evening before, when Mrs. Brabante learned that Lord Taunton had left the boat at Queenstown, and that it was Alwynne who had caused this hurried departure, was one the girl would never forget.

She had never known her mother's real nature until that moment, and the knowledge was fraught with a pain and a suffering that was not to be gauged all at once.

Words had been spoken that widened the gulf between mother and daughter into an absolute abyss. Alwynne's delicacy had been wounded, her modesty offended, her pride and dignity outraged.

"Please say no more, mother," she had said at last, with a sort of weary intensity. "Words will not alter the matter. I cannot think with you; and as we have to live together, it will be better to forget a subject that cannot but be productive of annoyance to us both."

"You do not know what you have done, you don't understand!" Mrs. Brabante had answered, furiously. "Great heavens, after all I have done for you, after all the trouble and care you have caused, after all the money you have had lavished upon you, to disappoint me in this way! You will never have such another chance! It was an absolute fairy story, and you have trodden it under your foot!"

So the argument had run on until Mrs. Brabante had fairly worn herself and her temper out for the time being. Alwynne had spent a miserable night. Hugo's eyes, those deep dark, blue oceans of passion, entreaty, adoration, reverence, haunted her. His few quiet words in which he spoke his love rang in her ears. There was a dull, dead pain at her heart, and with it all, mingling and covering it, was the sense of humiliation, of wounded pride, caused by her mother's anger. A vague alarm seized her as she went over and over again that interview.

She had never given much thought to her birth, descent, or early childhood; but now something—she knew not what—touched her quick, proud heart, and a whisper floated through her brain that there was a mystery attached to her mother and herself—a mystery which was in itself an explanation of much that had troubled her of late. A shiver ran through her slender body, drawn to its full height. Basil Canning felt that shiver; he suddenly bent his head and kissed her hand.

"I will be your friend all my life!" he said, and then there was no more time for further words. A great bustle and confusion ensued; the boat was boarded by a few dozen people come to meet their friends.

The voyage was at an end, and Alwynne saw and felt everything as in a dream. She held Basil's hand as long as she could; then Marie came to summon her, and she turned away with a farewell word, just as a tall young man came up to the boy. She carried away with her a vision of Basil's tearful eyes, and a sort of photograph on her memory of a laughing, sunny face that seemed full of happiness, good nature, health, and physical perfection.

"Basil will be well cared for now," she said to herself, as she stood beside her mother, and saw her boy friend taken in charge affectionately by this cousin. "I suppose," with a sigh that came from her heart, "that it is good-bye, indeed, between us!"

How little she knew, how little she guessed, as she gazed with her dreamy, sorrowful eyes at the figure of Basil and his strangely handsome cousin, that she was beholding one who would, before long, influence her whole life!

(To be continued.)

In 1793-94, pantaloons, cropped hair, and shoestrings, the total abolition of hair powder, buckles, and ruffles characterised the men, while ladies exhibited heads rounded *à la Victime, à la Guillotine.*

THE BELLE OF THE SEASON.

CHAPTER XLII.—*(continued.)*

The Earl shuddered at the thought, and cowered as if before a stern, reproachful gaze.

The doctor turned and regarded him with a penetrating look, and without appearing to do so.

"You are sure, doctor, no one will find me here?" he asked, in a timid whisper, glancing apprehensively about the room.

"Quite sure, your lordship; there is no need for fear——"

"Fear? Who says I fear? Why should I fear? You choose your words strangely, doctor. Would you mind stepping into the room adjoining, and leave me to look at my relative? I want to be alone a few moments, and I want you to act as sentinel. I feel unsafe here."

The doctor hesitated and directed a scorching glance at the Earl's face, as if he would read his soul, and then he muttered, inaudibly,—

"No, he would not dare to kill him! He is too great a coward for that! It will be safe to leave them alone together! Besides, whatever he may do will only place him further in my power."

With this mental decision he avowed his willingness to act as sentinel, and unlocked the door, passing into the dressing-room.

The Earl then arose, softly locked the door again, imagining that the movement was unsuspected, and then, with trembling limbs, approached the bedside.

"He cannot recognise me," he muttered, pausing at a little distance from it. "I dread to look upon him—yet I must."

He advanced softly, exerting all his will in the effort, and looked upon the face of the invalid.

He started back a step at beholding the grey hair, the thin, haggard face, with its lines of grief and anguish, and exclaimed,—

"It surely cannot be he! There must be some mistake."

The invalid turned restlessly at the sound of the visitor's voice, and looked vacantly at the Earl.

"It is he!" exclaimed his lordship, pressing his hand to his side; "but how he has changed. Oh! my heart!"

He sank down in the nurse's chair, as pale as death, but soon roused himself, arose again, and surveyed the sick man.

"How he looks at me;" he whispered: "why does he regard me so fixedly? He is delirious—he cannot know me."

It was no delusion on his part. The invalid was regarding him with strange intentness, but the gaze was, nevertheless, painfully vacant. There was not the faintest sign of emotion or recognition in it. He seemed to be strangely attracted by his lordship's countenance, however, and unable to withdraw his observation from it.

The Earl cowered like a criminal before him, and seized the back of the chair to support himself. But he soon gathered courage, perhaps because the sick gentleman continued his incoherent mutterings, and he said,—

"He will soon be well again! Oh, why does he not die? While he lives my life can be only one of continual fear and anxiety. Would that this fever would prove fatal! How has he managed to survive all these years of confinement and misery? There must be a fatality in it!"

The thought momentarily deprived him of self-possession, and he answered the invalid's vacant look by a stare of mingled terror and hatred.

"He might as well be dead as shut up in a dreary asylum," he resumed. "It would be a mercy to him to end his miserable life. It is necessary to my safety that he should die. I wish I dared kill him."

He seemed to think over the subject earnestly, and finally mused,—

"I—I—am afraid of him. I must be rid of him. One pressure with that pillow, and his breath would cease. The doctor would not dare expose me, and I should be safe. I will."

He caught up a pillow, held it above the sick man's head with deadly determination, and then paused instinctively.

"What are you doing?" muttered the sick man, uneasily. "Mother, where are you?"

The Earl caught his breath, and his arm shook.

"I don't want mother!" exclaimed the invalid; "but my wife—my angel wife! Where is she?—where is our child, my birdie?"

The Earl groaned aloud, and dropped the pillow.

The sick gentleman's allusion to his wife seemed to have touched a hidden chord in his lordship's breast, and he trembled like a leaf, and his face was convulsed with emotion.

"I cannot do it! I cannot!" he muttered. The doctor must do it for me. I will see him about it before my courage fails!"

He looked again at the invalid, like one who looks upon a familiar face for the last time, and as if he were trying to impress each particular feature upon his memory. At length, with a sigh, he turned away from his bedside, unlocked the door, and summoned the doctor, who was in close proximity to the keyhole.

The first movement of the "nurse" was to proceed to the bed and regard the invalid, as if expecting to behold a lifeless form. He then turned to the Earl, saying,—

"I suppose your lordship wishes to go now?"

"In a minute, doctor. I want to say something to you first. Do you think the patient will recover?"

"Why, he's likely to, my lord," was the reply. "He has an iron constitution, or he'd have died long ago. But I'm not saying he will recover," he added, significantly. "In a case like this now, a person is very likely to die, if anything is to be gained by his death!"

The Earl flushed and paled, as he answered,—

"But it seems to me it would be a mercy to put a lunatic out of the way of further misery?"

"I don't pretend to be merciful, your lordship," replied the doctor, coolly.

"I—I think I can trust you," whispered the Earl. "I wish the patient yonder were dead. If I were to hear of his death to-morrow, with proofs, I would give anything you might demand!"

"Anything?"

"Anything!" was the emphatic response.

The doctor looked meditative, then pleased, and said,—

"I will state my demand when I bring you the news. If nothing should occur to prevent, you shall hear what you desire to-morrow!"

The Earl grasped the doctor's hand in silence.

"Should I fail to-night for any reason whatever," continued the doctor, "I will carry out my plan to-morrow, as we designed it last night. My brother is already informed of it, and will be at hand to assist in its execution!"

The Earl assented, adding,—

"Keep everything as secret as possible. Don't let my name appear in the affair! And now conduct me downstairs again. This air stifles me. I was foolish to come here. I shan't get over the shock soon!"

The doctor made no reply, save by a quiet smile, and after seeing that the way was clear, conducted the midnight visitor down to the street door.

"Safe so far!" exclaimed the Earl, with a sigh of relief. "Don't forget! You are to name your own reward. I know you'll be faithful, doctor. Your fortune is in your own hands now!"

After a few further remarks, his lordship departed, and the doctor stole back to the sick chamber.

"What a coward the Earl is!" he thought, scornfully. "Why, if I had had his chance in here, and been in his place, that sick man would not have lived two minutes! He's the most singular combination of cowardice and villainy I ever beheld, but I mean to exact from him a splendid reward—a glorious reward!"

The doctor's eyes sparkled in anticipation, and he drew his breath hard. The next moment, however, he was as quiet and businesslike as ever, and drew from his pocket a tiny medicine-case.

It was well filled with phials of the medicines most in use, all duly labelled, and from among them it would not have been difficult to select several phials whose contents, as declared by the labels, were deadly poisons.

The doctor selected one of these, and taking up the cup of medicine poured into it several drops from the phial, then replacing the latter in his medicine-case.

As he did so he was somewhat startled at noticing that the invalid was regarding him with singular earnestness, and that his gaze had more of consciousness in it than at any time during the day.

"There, there!" he said soothingly. "Here's the nice medicine that will make you well, sir. Take it!"

But the invalid did not obey, continuing to look at him persistently, and with a painful expression on his countenance, as if he were trying hard to collect his wandering thoughts, and remember where he had seen him before.

The doctor was alarmed at this sudden improvement in the patient, and muttered,—

"He is actually recovering his consciousness. Could anything be more unfortunate? If I do not give this medicine immediately my plans are all defeated, as sure as fate. My plan for to-morrow—to be used if this should fail—will be equally useless. He must take it!"

He leaned over the invalid, cup in hand, and once more tried his persuasive eloquence.

"You want to get well, don't you, sir? Then take this medicine directly!"

He held it to the invalid's lips, but it was quietly pushed aside.

Something in the tone of the "nurse" caught the attention of the sick gentleman, and seemed to assist in his effort to gather his thoughts, for a look of disgust, mingled with apprehension, appeared on his face, and his eyes assumed a clearer, more defined expression.

"I don't want it!" he answered in a weak tone, but coherently enough. "I don't like it! Take it away!"

"But you must take it, sir——"

"Who are you? I seem to remember your voice, but you do not look familiar——"

The doctor became alarmed.

He had not had the slightest idea that the patient had so nearly regained his consciousness, having believed, from his own judgment of the case, that the fever would be lingering and severe. Hardly knowing how to break it up himself, he had not suspected that the physician in attendance was much wiser than himself, and he found it difficult to believe the patient so near recovery.

Laying his hand upon the gentleman's face he discovered it to be quite wet with perspiration. Its burning heat had gone! He then felt the pulse, and found that it had greatly lessened in force and quickness.

"There is not a second to be lost!" he muttered. "Skilfully as I am disguised, there is fear of my discovery if he should recover the full use of his senses. I must hasten!"

Acting upon this resolve, he threw one arm around the invalid, and with the other hand held the poisoned cup to the patient's lips, endeavouring to force him to drink it.

The invalid struggled a little, his illness having been too brief to entirely waste his strength, gathered himself up into a sitting posture, and with sudden energy dashed the cup from the doctor's hand!

And then, before his enemy could stir, he caught hold of the doctor's wig and beard, pulling them off, and exclaimed, in a tone that showed that he had regained full and entire consciousness,—

"I know you now, Dr. Mure! I know you now!"

The doctor started back, perfectly paralysed at the turn affairs had taken; and the invalid, still clutching the nurse's disguise, uttered a loud, piercing cry, that startled both Walter and his valet from their sleep.

CHAPTER XLIII.

I know thee not—and yet our spirits seem
Together linked by sympathy and love,
—*Mrs. Welby.*

I would bring balm and pour it in your wound,
Cure your distempered mind, and heal your fortunes.
—*Dryden.*

The cry of the invalid was followed by another and another, still more piercing, and before the sound had died from the chamber, or Dr. Mure had recovered his self-possession, Walter had reached his bedside. Parkin, who was half-frightened out of his senses by the sudden tumult, followed his master. The artist was startled at the scene that met his gaze—the patient sitting upright in his bed, holding the wig and beard of the nurse in his hands, and the doctor, without disguise, other than his stained complexion, standing in an attitude of bewilderment beside him.

"What does this mean?" demanded Walter, looking from one to the other.

The invalid recognised the artist at once as his benefactor, of Rock Land, and, uttering a cry of joy, fell back on his pillow.

A prolonged observation of the cowering doctor convinced Walter that he beheld the nurse whom he had hired to care for the fugitive, and he comprehended that for some purpose he had been disguised. It was easy to see that the invalid had stripped him of his disguise, but the whole matter seemed to the artist almost too mysterious for comprehension.

"Be kind enough to explain this scene, Mr. Bowen," he said, fixing a stern gaze upon the doctor.

"No explanation is necessary," responded the doctor, doggedly. "Your friend here is delirious, and thinks he has seen me before—that's all!"

The patient struggled again to a sitting position, and exclaimed in a tone of intense excitement, which was seen to be perfectly free from delirium,—

"He is my enemy—the person who had imprisoned me for years—the doctor!"

Walter uttered an exclamation of surprise, and regarded the exposed nurse narrowly. Despite the stained complexion, he was not long in recognising him as one of the men he had seen guarding the fugitive at Rock Land.

The doctor, not being aware of the recognition, or that he had ever before been seen by the artist, speedily concocted an explanation which appeared to him very plausible, and informed Walter that it was all a mistake, that he wore a wig and false beard to avoid recognition from pressing creditors, and that he knew nothing whatever of the patient, having never seen him before entering upon his present duties.

"Stop!" interrupted Walter, sternly. "I have seen you before, and know who and what you are! I know you entered this house in order to injure my friend in some way, and I order you to quit it directly—without a minute's delay!"

The crestfallen doctor saw that the artist was in earnest, and he felt some awe and fear before Walter's flashing eyes, and slight, commanding figure. Without venturing another word, and apparently rejoiced to get off so well, he started for the door.

"Take your wig and beard with you!" commanded Walter. "You can tell your employer that your schemes—whatever they were—have failed, and that he need not be at the trouble to repeat them, as my friend will be sufficiently guarded in future!"

The doctor mechanically picked up his late disguise from the floor to which they had fallen, and left the room with the air of a whipped cur. Parkin followed him to the ante-chamber, made him put on his hat, which he was near forgetting, and then with sundry threats of police and justice, ushered him from the building, carefully locking the doors behind him.

Meanwhile the fugitive had continued to sit in his bed, looking about him with a strangely wondering gaze, finally regarding his host with an expression of mingled astonishment and gratitude.

"Where am I?" he asked, excitedly. "I fell upon the sands, upon the seashore, weary and ill, and awaken here and in your care! Oh, tell me——"

"Hush!" said Walter, in a tone of gentle authority. "You are safe, and must not think of your late dangers. I found you on the seashore and brought you to my chambers in London, where you now are. I will tell you more after you shall have slept!"

As he spoke, the artist gently insisted upon his patient's lying down, and smoothed his pillows, and wiped his forehead of its dripping perspiration, with womanly tenderness.

The fugitive seemed desirous of talking and of asking more questions, but Walter's air of quiet firmness commanded his obedience, and his feelings found vent only in a look of relief and intense gratitude. To allay his excitability and restlessness, Walter administered to him an anodyne, and under its influence he soon fell asleep, his hand clasped in that of his host.

For hours the artist sat by the bedside of the invalid, leaving him but once or twice, and then only to partake of necessary food and exercise in the adjoining dressing-room. And for hours the fugitive lay in a deathlike sleep, giving no sign of life beyond the faint regular heaving of his chest.

Parkin stole into the room several times, entreating to be allowed to relieve his master at his post, but Walter steadily declined his services, although he allowed his faithful valet to share his duties as nurse.

When the physician called he expressed little surprise and considerable gratification at the great change for the better in his patient, and declared that the fever was entirely broken up, and there was no danger of a relapse.

"He will soon be about, Mr. Loraine," he said. "His constitution seems to have been naturally strong, and his convalescence will be very rapid, I think. His illness has been too brief to deplete his strength greatly!"

Walter declared his pleasure at this announcement, and, after a few additional remarks and some directions, the physician took his departure.

Early in the afternoon the fugitive opened his eyes in recognition of the kindly face beside him, and tightened his clasp of Walter's hand, giving it a grateful pressure.

With his disengaged hand the artist felt the pulse of the invalid, and said,—

"You may talk now, sir. The doctor has been here, and says you are getting on finely——"

"The doctor!" repeated the invalid, with a startled expression on his white face, and a quick glance around the room.

"Yes, the physician whom I always employ in case of illness," answered Walter, reassuringly.

"Then I have been ill! How long?"

The artist replied by relating how he had found him upon the sandy sea-coast, and had brought him to his chambers in London.

"But—but Doctor Mure? How came he here?"

"He was recommended to me under an as-

sumed name," was the reply, "as a superior nurse, and I engaged him to attend you. How did you discover his identity?"

"He was trying to make me drink poison, I think," said the invalid, "and I suddenly seemed to regain my senses and recognise him. I think I knew him by his wicked eyes, and so I clutched at his disguise. How nice it seems to be here!"

As he uttered the last sentence, the dark man's eyes wandered curiously about every object in the bed-chamber, dwelling upon the pictures on the walls, the statuettes upon marble brackets, the various handsome adornings, and lastly, upon the luxurious bed which he occupied.

It had been many years since his gaze had rested upon such luxuries.

Walter propped him up in the bed, in an easy position, and then said,—

"Shall I not communicate with your daughter, sir? If you will give me her address——"

"Not yet—not yet!" replied the invalid, nervously. "Not till I am quite well. If she were to know of my being alive she could not keep her knowledge from my enemy, and I should be doomed. I must be patient a little longer—only a little longer."

His lips quivered as he spoke, and his countenance assumed an expression of patience that seemed to have been familiar to it.

"If you would confide in me I might be able to give you material assistance," declared the artist. "I do not like to force myself into your confidence, sir; but it is evident to me that you need a sincere and earnest friend."

"I do," was the agitated response. "No one needs a friend more than I do. Give me a little time to think, Mr. Loraine."

Walter replied by withdrawing himself from the bedside, in order that his presence might not disturb the reflections of the guest, who gave himself up to earnest thought.

After a long silence the invalid summoned him, and said,—

"Pardon me, Mr. Loraine, if I withhold my confidence from you a little longer. I have every faith in your friendship and discretion, and do not hesitate from want of confidence in you; but I fear that, when you become aware of my history, you will also be marked for persecution by my wicked enemy. You have been so good to me that I cannot endure the thought of bringing evil upon you."

"You need have no such fears, sir," replied Walter. "I am not without friends or self-reliance."

"True; but they cannot protect you from the insidious arts of the man to whom I owe the wreck of my life. Dr. Mure found his way to my bedside, his identity unsuspected by you; and there are other men equally ready to work harm to me, who would need but a hint to include you in their wicked schemes. Who knows but there may be spies in the very next room?"

He concluded with a sudden look of alarm and apprehension, starting up as if to flee, and Walter found it a difficult task to soothe him into his previous calmness.

"I am not safe here," said the haunted fugitive, after a pause. "Dr. Mure has been here, and it even seems to me that my enemy has breathed this very air. It may seem wild, but I had a vision of him last night. He looked dark, menacing, terrible, as if he longed to kill me. Oh, I am not safe here, Mr. Loraine. I am only bringing trouble on you by remaining."

Walter comprehended that the apprehensions of his guest were due to his years of suffering, the adventure with Dr. Mure on the previous night, and his present physical weakness; and he exerted himself to encourage and soothe him.

As he leaned over the patient, his glorious beauty revealed to the best advantage by the full light from the window, the attention of the invalid seemed to be diverted from himself, and he regarded his host with singular earnestness. The cause of that regard was evinced by his next remark.

"I have thought once or twice that your face was familiar to me, Mr. Loraine, and I now see the reason. You are the very image of Lord Rosenbury at your age! Perhaps you are a relative of his lordship?"

"No, I am not," replied Walter. "The same remark has often been made to me before. I knew his lordship, and I owe my present prosperity to him. You speak of him as alive, sir. Do you not know that he is dead?"

"Dead! Ah, no, I did not know it!" said the invalid, with a sigh. "Dead! I suppose that most of those I once knew are dead? It seems to me, Mr. Loraine, that you must be mistaken in declaring yourself in no way related to Lord Rosenbury. Your likeness to him, his likeness to you—surely these are not accidental circumstances?"

"They are, indeed," declared Walter, with a flush on his cheeks, "particularly the first. I had no claim whatever upon Lord Rosenbury's consideration beyond having been born upon his estate of Rosenbury Heath. My birth was humble, my mother having been before her marriage a favourite servant of Lady Rosenbury, and my father was employed as a gardener by his late lordship."

"Impossible!" ejaculated the invalid, as he marked the noble features and patrician bearing of his young host.

"By no means, sir. I see you are surprised that a gardener's son should have attained to the degree of luxury you see around me, and I will give you an explanation. The present Lord Rosenbury was my foster-brother in his infancy, and on that account, perhaps, Lady Rosenbury took a deep interest in me. I early showed a fondness for pictures and painting, and her ladyship, having the same tastes in an unusual degree, took great pride in my development, particularly as her own son showed no taste for art. I spent days and weeks at Rosenbury House, studying the contents of the picture-gallery, and winning the friendship of both the noble pair. His lordship sent me to the University, and afterwards to Italy. At his death, he crowned his goodness to me by leaving me an annuity of five hundred a-year."

"A strange history!" commented the fugitive, who had listened with great interest to the narration, although he had not neglected to keep up a sort of watch upon the door, as if his fears had only been quieted, not destroyed. "I do not wonder at the interest felt in you by Lord and Lady Rosenbury, but I consider your resemblance to his late lordship as something at the least extremely remarkable."

Walter had heard similar remarks very often from friends of Lady Rosenbury, and he attached very little importance to them, considering his singular likeness to the late Lord Rosenbury as one of those coincidences which sometimes, though seldom, occur.

Instead, therefore, of devoting thought to this subject, on which so much might have been suggested to him, he thought of the familiarity shown by the fugitive with the name of Rosenbury, and concluded that his guest had enjoyed the same social status—although, of course, that did not necessarily follow from the mere fact of a former acquaintance with noble people. But the fugitive was so refined and gentlemanly, showed such intimate knowledge of the courtesies of existence, used such correct language, etc., that it was easy to prove him educated, and Walter had sufficient insight into human nature to feel assured that he could place implicit trust in the truthfulness of his guest.

"And so you are a painter, Mr. Loraine?" asked the fugitive, after regarding Walter's thoughtful face for some time in silence.

"I am," replied Walter, arousing himself from his reverie. "These pictures on the walls are mine."

The invalid turned his gaze up on the paintings indicated, but soon returned it to the artist, asking to what class of pictures he devoted his attention.

"To original pictures, such as fancy portraits of personages who have captivated my fancy," was the reply "like the heroes and heroines of poetry. I also paint bits of landscape, and work out my own ideas upon canvas."

"Then you never paint portraits?"

"That is not my vocation," answered Walter, with a smile. "I think I should never succeed in that branch of art, for I should not have my heart in my work. I have painted a few portraits," he added, "but very few. Among them were two or three different ones of the late Lord Rosenbury. Her ladyship, I believe, has always a copy in her private sitting-room, whether at her town or country house."

As his guest seemed greatly interested in hearing his past history, and in listening seemed to forget his apprehensions, Walter entertained him at some length, relating anecdotes of Lady Rosenbury and her late husband, illustrative of their goodness and nobility of character, and occasionally modestly touching upon incidents in his own career.

"I should like to see more of your paintings, Mr. Loraine," at length said the invalid.

"You shall, sir, when you are able to be moved into the studio. I shall then be very happy to show you, not only my own pictures—those I have remaining—but also some by several of the acknowledged masters of the art. I think you will be able to sit up a little in a day or two."

"Oh, yes, I must sit up to-morrow!" said the invalid, eagerly. "I ought to be up to-day, I really ought. I have no time to lose in idleness."

"We will see how you feel to-morrow. If you are able to sit up you shall be moved into another room for change of scene."

"Thank you. You are very kind to me, Mr. Loraine, as kind as if you were my own son. How proud your mother must be of you!"

Walter replied that she was dead.

"You are not married, of course?"

"Not yet," answered the artist, with a blush that did not escape the quick, keen gaze of his guest.

"I hope when you marry you will find a wife who can appreciate you!" said the invalid, slowly. "I was blest in my married life more than men usually are, Mr. Loraine, and I cannot desire for you greater happiness than I enjoyed. I think a couple could not be happier than we were—my gentle wife and I."

He seemed about to sink into a painful reverie, when the artist replied, the flush on his cheeks deepening,—

"I have already chosen my future wife, sir, and she is an angel among women! Beautiful in form and feature, lovely in character, sweet-tempered, witty, generous, and truthful, she is a rare and noble lady, worthy of the deepest love and veneration. Sh is the belle of the season!"

"Indeed! A beauty and a belle. Is she of noble birth?"

"She is. I was employed to paint her portrait, and while so engaged I learned to admire and love her. I discovered, through no means of hers, for she is very shy about such things, that her hand and purse were always open to do good unostentatiously; that though she was the gay and courted belle in society, many of her smiles were lavished upon the poor and broken-hearted, to whom her visits were like sunshine, and that wherever she moved she carried happiness with her."

"She must be a noble lady, in truth!" said the fugitive, upon whom Walter's enthusiasm made a great impression.

"I cannot speak all her nobleness and goodness," responded Walter, with moistened eyes. "Not the least of it is, that she gave me encouragement to tell her my love, and then deigned to accept my suit. She knew of my humble birth, had seen my father in a state of intoxication, and was aware of my want of fortune, and yet she thought of nothing but

our congeniality of soul and tastes, and that she loved me. Our engagement is still secret," he added, "as it does not meet with the approbation of her guardian, who wishes her to marry a man of noble birth, the present Lord Rosenbury. We have accordingly agreed to wait until the lady comes of age, or until something favourable to us shall occur. There is no likelihood of our marriage taking place this year."

He concluded with a sigh, and a momentary look of depression shadowed his usually bright face.

"If I regain my rights," said the fugitive, "I may be able to further your cause with the lady's guardian, Mr. Loraine. If want of fortune be the obstacle, and I come into my own, we shall speedily overcome his objections. If want of rank, we must overcome his prejudices by telling him of the great painters who from the humblest positions have become the honoured guests of kings."

"His motives are entirely different, sir," returned Walter, impelled to continue his confidence, yet wondering why he did so. "The lady possesses a large fortune, and her guardian, who is involved in difficulties, desires to retain a large portion of it for himself. Lord Rosenbury made some sort of arrangement with him, making the lady's hand an object of barter and sale, and her guardian is determined to compel her to wed him."

"Infamous!" exclaimed the invalid, his pale cheeks flashing with indignation. "But the lady will not yield?"

"Never. She does not like Lord Rosenbury, and will not marry him."

"I once had an extensive acquaintance with titled persons," said the fugitive, after a pause; "and I may even have been acquainted with the guardian of this young lady, or her friends. Will you tell me her name?"

Walter momentarily hesitated, in surprise at his own extraordinary communicativeness to one who was nearly an entire stranger; but he saw no reason to deny the request for the name of his betrothed.

"Since I have told you so much, sir, of the lady and myself," he said, "I have no objection to telling you her name, although it may be long before our engagement is made public. She is Lady Geraldine Summers, the niece of the Earl of Montford."

The fugitive started, as if to rise from the pillow, and then sank back, his face wearing a pallor like that of death.

Walter, being absorbed in his own reflections, did not notice the emotion of his guest, who finally murmured,—

"And you are engaged to marry her?"

The artist replied in the affirmative.

"And she is the noble being you have described to me?"

Walter assented.

Tears sprang to the eyes of the fugitive, and a look of intense joy irradiated his countenance, while he seemed to be breathing a prayer of thanksgiving.

"I—I know the family once," he said, as the artist at length looked at him. "How singular that you are engaged to marry her! She could not have chosen more wisely than in accepting you as her future husband."

"I fear I have excited you by this talk of people with whose names you have been familiar, sir," remarked Walter. "I ought to leave you."

"No, no," pleaded the invalid. "So you painted the picture of the lady? Have you a copy of it? Would you let me see it?"

"I have a copy painted on ivory," was the response. "It was copied from the large picture. As my description of her—feeble as it was—seemed to have interested you in Lady Geraldine, I shall take pleasure in showing you her portrait."

He turned away, drawing from his bosom the picture which was attached to his neck by a slender chain of gold, and, opening the case, handed it to his guest.

"While you look at that," he said, "I will go into my studio for a *carte de visite* portrait of Lady Geraldine, and from both you can form a correct idea of her appearance."

He withdrew, intent upon the entertainment of the invalid, and the latter regarded the picture.

It was an excellent portrait of Geraldine, portraying her in all her youthful bloom and loveliness, and as the fugitive gazed upon it a heavy mist of tears obscured his vision. Dashing away the tears, he looked long and earnestly, and then pressed the picture to his lips, kissing it with a passionate tenderness, and yearning, murmuring incoherent, and unintelligible words.

His agitation and emotion were subdued by the time the artist returned with the *carte* picture, and he compared the two calmly, giving preference to the one on ivory.

"I knew you would admire her!" said Walter, restoring the picture and chain to his person. "But you look worn and tired, sir. Can you not get a little more sleep?"

"I will try," answered the invalid, merely closing his eyes. "I must get strength for to-morrow. I am impatient to set about reclaiming my rights!"

Walter drew the fleecy curtains of the bed, that the light might not render his guest wakeful, and then withdrew to a little distance, indulging in lover-like thoughts of his betrothed.

CHAPTER XLIV.

Must I consume my life—this little life—
In guarding against all may make it less?
—*Byron.*

The invalid spent the remainder of the day and the subsequent night in tranquil sleep, and Walter gave up his post as nurse to Parkin, retiring to his couch in the studio. He rose early on the morrow, and returned to his guest, who was already awake, and appearing quite well, with the exception of a little excitability and nervousness. Expressing his pleasure at this improvement in the health of the invalid, the artist informed him that he would soon be permitted to leave his bed for another room.

"I must get up this morning," was the decided answer. "It would injure me far more to lie in bed than to sit up. I am almost well, Mr. Loraine!"

Walter endeavoured to persuade him to bear inaction a little longer, but the patient replied by assuring him that his illness had done him no injury whatever, having served only to deprive him of a portion of his too great excitability.

"I am as strong as ever!" he concluded, "or, at any rate, quite strong enough to walk about."

Seeing him so determined to rise and conquer his illness, the artist finally yielded to the demands of his guest, promising that he should take his breakfast in the studio. Parkin was informed of the proposed movement, and after completing the preparations necessary to the change of quarters, assisted the invalid to attire himself.

His toilet completed, and habited in one of Walter's dressing-gowns, the fugitive was placed in an easy arm-chair, and wheeled through the dressing-room into the studio, which appeared to even better advantage than usual, the easel, etc., having been stowed in an adjacent closet, and the air being perfumed with the odour of fresh flowers.

Walter came forward with a smile to welcome his guest, who looked about him with an air of surprise, exclaiming,—

"And this is your studio, Mr. Loraine? It looks like a lady's boudoir."

"Ladies come here sometimes to look at my pictures," responded Walter. "Besides," he added, "I like these little luxuries about me on my own account. I quite appreciate these modern appliances, and am glad I did not happen to live in those barbarous days when a roof overhead and a pile of straw to lie upon were considered [the great luxuries of existence."

As the fugitive looked upon Walter's bright, handsome face, and his commanding form enveloped in his gay gown, he thought that the luxuries filling the room were very appropriately bestowed upon their owner.

While the artist conversed pleasantly with his guest Parkin was intent upon hospitality, and soon announced that breakfast was ready.

The invalid was wheeled to the breakfast-table, which presented an array of delicate viands, with coffee and tea. In the centre of the table stood a Parian vase filled with flowers, and a tiny bouquet lay beside each plate.

"It's a long time since I sat at a breakfast-table, Mr. Loraine," said the fugitive, with a sigh. "Ah! if you but knew the daily tortures of my existence for years!"

(*To be continued.*)

THE HEIRESS OF DEEPDENE.

CHAPTER XXII.

"GOOD BYE."

The morning—which Madeline, tossing restlessly on her bed, thought would never come—dawned at last, cold and grey, and murky with the remains of last night's fog.

The young girl did not go down to breakfast, for she felt it would be impossible to face Godfrey, even before the servants; and a little after ten o'clock she heard him go out, accordeng to his usual custom of late.

Shortly afterwards a servant came up to announce a visitor, whom Madeline, on entering the drawing room, found to be none other than Dr. Earnshaw.

As we know, he was not a special favourite of hers; and yet, at that precise juncture, she was glad to see him. His face was at least a familiar one, and when we are in trouble there is a good deal in that.

"How are the Deepdene people getting on?" she asked, with an effort to speak brightly.

"Much the same as usual," he replied, "except that Mr. Walters is ill. If that had not been the case, I should not have been here now, for I have simply come in his stead. It was necessary to consult you on a matter of business regarding the sale of a small portion of the estate——"

"It must not be sold—not a yard, not an inch of it?" she exclaimed, with a vehemence that considerably surprised him. Then she recollected herself, "I mean, I do not think it would have been Sir Richard's wish that the estate should be diminished."

"If you will allow me, I will explain," he said, quietly. "A railway line is in course of construction through Deepdene, and the company is anxious to purchase a small outlying piece of your property, and to pay a good price for it. Of course Mr. Walters and I could have arranged the matter ourselves, but I prefer consulting your wishes in all that has to do with the estate, when that is possible."

"You are very good," she murmured, in a low voice, while Earnshaw proceeded to lay before her a plan of the estate, and point out the exact plot of land the railway wanted to acquire.

After all, the matter was not one of great importance, and, in spite of the doctor's assurance, it is very improbable he would have troubled to come up to town to arrange it if he had not been consumed with an overwhelming desire to see Madeline in her new home, and to try and discover the terms existing between her and Godfrey. Were they happy, or had she already regretted her hasty marriage?

The details of that marriage were still a

mystery to Earnshaw, but a mystery which he had made up his mind to solve.

"You don't look well!" he observed, sympathetically, after the business was all settled, and Madeline had affixed her signature to the necessary documents. "You had better let me prescribe for you."

The young girl shook her head.

"Your prescription would do me no good now," she said, slowly. "I am in trouble, and I have not been able to sleep, otherwise I believe I am well enough."

Earnshaw drew a little nearer.

"In trouble! I am sorry to hear you make such a confession. I suppose, old friend as I am, both of yours and Sir Richard's, I dare not ask for your confidence, though you know, without the telling, that you have my sympathy."

He spoke half interrogatively, as if uncertain how she would receive his words, and it was assuredly a surprise to him when she turned round with an impulsive movement, and laid her hand on his arm.

"Dr. Earnshaw," she said, fixing her dark earnest eyes on his. "You were, as you say, a friend of Sir Richard's, and it is probable that you were in his confidence. Did you know of the existence of the sealed packet which he entrusted to Mr. Walters for me?"

"Yes," he replied, slowly. "I knew of its existence, but I was not aware of the whole of its contents. I believe, however, they were an explanation of why Sir Richard had disinherited his nephew in your favour. Is that right?"

"It is. Do you"—a burning blush covered her face from neck to brow, and her hand fell from his arm—"do you know the reason of Captain Vane's inheritance?"

"Yes," he responded, quietly. "I had been aware of it for some time before Sir Richard's death."

"Then I am going to ask you a question—and oh! as you value your honour, I implore you to answer me truthfully!" There was no blush now on her face. It had faded to a deadly pallor, but her eyes were raised to his in pitiful, agonised entreaty, and her slim hands were clasped together as if in prayer. "There is just a possibility that Sir Richard may have been mistaken, and you, who know so much of his affairs, would be in a position to give me some assurance on this point. Tell me, was it proved beyond all chance of doubt that Godfrey Vane took Ellen Chalmers away from her home?"

"It was so proved beyond all chance of doubt," he responded, repeating her words quietly, and with a terrible assurance. "The father, Luke Chalmers, was driven nearly mad by the shame, and left Deepdene almost immediately afterwards, swearing that he would revenge his wrongs on Captain Vane. How he kept his vow you yourself were an eye-witness."

* * * * *

There was no longer room for doubt in Madeline's mind now, and all hesitation vanished. She had determined on her plan of action, and she would carry it through, to the bitter end, no matter at what cost to herself.

She dismissed Earnshaw curtly enough, but how the rest of the day passed she did not know.

In the evening, when she was changing her morning gown for the one she usually wore in the evening, she happened to catch sight of her face in the glass, and its ghastly pallor startled her.

It would not do for Godfrey to see her thus. He would guess something of the agony she was enduring, and might put it down to its true cause.

Madeline's pride took fire at the thought, and she snatched up a rough towel and rubbed her cheeks with it until the friction produced a crimson glow, and she looked more like herself.

Then she made an extra careful toilet; and when she finally swept downstairs it would have been impossible to divine that the graceful, dark-eyed girl, with her calm face, and her rich silken draperies, was, in reality, suffering such tortures as only come to us—thank Heaven!—once or twice in a lifetime.

Godfrey, in faultless evening dress, and with a flower in his coat, looked handsomer than usual that night, his blue eyes gleaming with excitement. His manner was scrupulously polite to his wife—too polite, indeed—for there was a careful ceremony in it that would have been more in place if they had been complete strangers to each other.

"I shall be glad to see you in the drawing-room as soon as possible," she said to him, as he held open the door for her to pass out, when their miserable pretence of a meal was concluded. "I wish to speak to you on a matter of some importance."

"I will come at once, if you like."

"Oh, no! It will do when you have finished your cigar."

In less than half-an-hour he joined her. She was sitting near the fire, holding a screen of peacock's feathers between her face and the light, and on her lap rested an open book. There was nothing in her face or attitude to show that she was on the eve of the one supreme tragedy of her life!

Godfrey stood opposite her, with one elbow resting on the mantelboard. His left hand pulled nervously at his long, fair moustache.

"What is it you have to say?" he asked presently, after a few moments' silence, during which she had been having a hard struggle, to still the vehement throbbing of her heart.

"This. That I have been considering various things—your position, my position, and the circumstances attending our marriage—and I have come to the conclusion that there is no necessity for me to leave England, as you wish. At the same time, this determination on my part need make no difference to you. Perhaps it would be as well—nay, better, under present conditions, that you should be abroad."

He stared at her in surprise. Her voice was level, even to monotony, and she spoke with a quiet, straightforward matter of factness that rather added than took from the effect of her words.

"Do you mean you wish me to go and leave you behind?" he exclaimed at last.

She bowed assent without speaking.

"But that is impossible, Madeline! Recollect you are my wife in the eyes of the world, and my honour alone compels me to give you the protection of my presence!"

She lifted the velvet darkness of her lashes very slowly, and let her eyes meet his. Godfrey was startled at the passionate depths of scorn they betrayed.

"Your honour!" It is impossible to describe the contempt with which she uttered these two words. It seemed as if all the pent up despair that pride held back forced its way through the barriers, and looked at him for just the space of five heart-beats. Then her eyes fell, and she lifted the fan that had dropped from her nerveless fingers. "I think we may leave your honour out of the question," she added quietly.

Godfrey felt stupefied. So utterly unprepared was he for this new development on Madeline's part that he was at a loss how to meet it.

Finding he did not speak, Madeline continued,—

"As for what people either say or think I don't fancy we need concern ourselves; and so far as your protection goes, I must learn to do without it. I am young, it is true, but each year will remedy that."

"Then, do you propose that I should leave you—for ever?" broke from his lips.

"Yes, for ever! When I bid you farewell to-night I have no desire ever to see your face again."

Alas! for the sick anguish that was in her soul while she spoke those cruel words. If she was stabbing him, the steel went through her own heart first.

Godfrey turned away, so that she should not see how the shot told. He was absolutely dumbfounded at the suddenness and completeness of the change that had come over her.

"What has happened, Madeline?" he asked, and there was a certain pitiful entreaty in his tone. "Is it the unfortunate matter of yesterday that has made you so unlike yourself? I am willing to give you a full explanation of my acquaintance with Ellen Chalmers if you wish it, though the story might be a painful confession on my part."

She rose to her feet and faced him, the colour rushing in a swift flood to her cheeks, while her eyes flashed with passionate scorn.

"I will not hear your confession! What is it to me whether you make a confession or not? My mind is made up, and nothing you can say will alter it. I do not wish to live with you any longer—more, I absolutely refuse to remain under the same roof with you after to-morrow!"

Her bosom heaved tumultuously, and it seemed as if, for the moment, she had given reins to the fever of excitement that was within her, and that threatened to carry her away with it.

At the sight of her agitation he grew calmer.

"Very well. If it is distasteful for you to be sheltered by the roof that covers me, I will leave you," he said, quietly, "for I acknowledge that you have a right to dictate terms to me, and that it behoves me to accept them without demur. Still, I am much older than you are, both in years and in knowledge of the world; and I am well aware that a woman separated from her husband is at a great disadvantage—especially if she be young. For that reason, if for no other, I would ask you to reconsider what you have said."

"No, I have thought it all over, and no matter what the consequences to myself may be, I am willing to risk them."

"Then," there was a slight tremor in his voice, "I suppose the fact of the matter is, I am personally so repugnant to you that you are determined to get rid of me at all hazards?"

A great lump rose in her throat, but she choked it down. It was better for him to think this.

"Yes, if you put it in that way."

"And that is your only reason?" He came nearer, and laid his hands on her shoulders, thus forcing her to face him. "Answer me, Madeline! and recollect this is no child's play. We are men and women, whose whole future depends on the result of this evening."

His voice was stern—almost hard—and he looked down into her eyes with piercing intenseness.

"Have you any reason except the one you have stated?"

Compelled thus, Madeline could not tell a lie. She faltered, and her eyes fell.

"Ah!" Godfrey exclaimed, triumphantly, "I am correct in my idea. Something has happened lately that has taken away your trust in me. At least, I have the right to know what it is."

She forcibly wrenched herself from him.

"I do not acknowledge your right. You will remember that at our marriage there was no question of affection between us, and my own impression was that we should part immediately after the ceremony, and there would be no need for us to see each other again. That this plan was not carried out was your doing, and I consented to what you proposed, because I thought it would be better for you. But now the necessity no longer exists. You insist on leaving England, and whether I am with you or not will make no difference to people's opinion of you."

Godfrey grew a shade paler. It flashed across him that his refusal to let the detective go on with his endeavours to penetrate the mystery of Luke Chalmers' death had aroused his wife's suspicions, and she believed him guilty of the murder.

For a moment he did not speak. The thought was so horrible that it kept him silent.

"We need not go on discussing the matter,"

Madeline said, with a little gesture of weariness, meant to cover the emotion she could not hide. "It seems to me all has been said that need be said—except good-bye."

She moved towards the door, but he sprang forward, and stood in her path, so as to intercept her.

"Wait a minute," he cried, hoarsely. "Before you go you must answer me one question. When you consented to marry me you believed me an honourable man. Do you still believe that?"

An honourable man! Madeline's lip curled with deepest scorn. How dared he have the audacity to ask her such a question?

'No!" she said, clearly and distinctly. "Since our marriage I have, unfortunately, had cause to change my opinion."

His head fell on his breast, and something that sounded like a groan escaped his lips, but he made no attempt at justification.

Madeline swept forward, with a silken rustle of her trailing skirts. At the door she paused and looked back, longing—oh how intensely!—to hear him utter some protest against this condemnation of hers. But none came. Godfrey was like one who is stricken dumb by the force of some overwhelming calamity, and it is possible that he was even unaware she had gone until he heard the door swing back after her.

And this was their parting!

CHAPTER XXIII.

AFTERWARDS.

The next morning a note was brought to Madeline, containing a few words from Godfrey, telling her that he had left the house, and given her the freedom she craved.

"In all likelihood," the letter said, "we shall never meet again. Better, indeed, had it been for you had we never met at all! I am going to seek my fortune under another name, in a new world, and my only regret is that, in leaving you, I cannot dissolve the tie that bound us together. All I can do is to promise I will never make any claim upon you, or any effort to see you again, and to beg your forgiveness for the past."

The young girl put the note on one side, with a pitiful quivering of her white lips. She knew that she and happiness had bade each other a final farewell; and the years, stretching out before her in a long, colourless perspective, seemed fraught with a perfect terror. How should she ever get through them? How would the long days ever pass until the end came?

She did not weep. Tears were a luxury she would not permit herself, but she went about her usual little housewifely duties with a mechanical care, and a face paler than a new-fallen snow wreath.

The servants watched her curiously. They knew something unusual had taken place; and when the days passed on, and the master did not appear, they gave a pretty shrewd guess at the truth.

It was not until nearly a week had gone by that it occurred to Madeline she owed it as a sort of duty to the Trehernes to acquaint them with Godfrey's departure; and the day after the letter had been posted she was not very much surprised to see Katie come running into the drawing-room, her eyes full of something that looked suspiciously like tears.

"Oh! Madeline, darling, things are not quite so bad as your letter makes out!" she cried, throwing herself impulsively into her friend's arms. "Tell me that you have exaggerated—that Godfrey will come back, and you two will be happy together again!"

Madeline shook her head, and drew away from Mrs. Treherne's embrace.

"No Katie. He will never come back."

Katie looked up quickly. There was something in the cold, dry, hopeless voice in which Madeline spoke that touched her to the heart, for it hinted at a suffering which the little, frivolous, albeit, kindly creature, could hardly comprehend.

"Ah, why did you let him go?" she cried, reproachfully.

"Because it was best—best for him, and for me as well."

"And yet you seemed as if Heaven had cut you out for each other. I never saw two people who were better suited! But, there! what's the good of talking? It seems to me in this world things all go contrariwise; and as for trying to make another match I would cut my right hand off rather than do it!" Katie concluded, energetically.

Then she began taking her things off, and mechanically looked at herself in the glass, while she gave sundry little pats and touches to her hair.

"I am going to stay with you for a few days, my dear! Directly I got your letter I said to John, 'Madeline's in trouble, Jack, and as I helped to get her in it, it seems to me my duty to try and get her out of it'—not that it appears to be such an easy matter!" she added, *sotto voce*.

Madeline made no reply. Truth to tell, she was in that state of unnatural calm when outward events fail to make much impression on one. All her faculties seemed held under the spell of an icy chill, and it must be something of more than ordinary importance that could wake her up to life and interest.

So Katie stayed on, trying her best to "cheer up" the pale faced mistress of the Queen Anne Villa, but meeting with very small success. At last the little lady, in despair, sent for her husband, and consulted with him as to the best steps to take in the matter.

"Oh dear! oh dear!" she sobbed, with her face on the big, burly fellow's shoulder, "I wish to goodness I had never interfered between them one way or other, but just let Godfrey take his chance when he was threatened with arrest! It would have been ever so much better for both."

John was silent. He even refrained from the retort that he might, with perfect justice, have made—"I told you so!"

"Well," Katie added, more briskly, "it's no use crying over spilt milk, and what we have to do is to see if we can't mend matters. Madeline is very miserable, and she won't tell me much beyond the fact that she and Godfrey have parted for ever, but I have my own ideas on the subject."

"And what are they?"

"Why, I hear from the servants that the day before Captain Vane's departure that horrid Dr. Earnshaw was here, and had a long talk with Madeline, and that when she went upstairs to her room afterwards she was crying. Of course he had been making mischief between the two, and in consequence of that Godfrey decided to go."

"It must have been mischief of a very serious nature that would make him clear out," observed John, sagaciously.

"Of course it was, you old stupid! And I have been racking my brains to find out exactly what it was. The conclusion I have come to is, that Earnshaw, by hook or by crook, contrived to make Madeline believe that Godfrey was really guilty of murdering Chalmers, and that she, in disgust, declared she would have nothing more to do with him."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Jack, looking with a species of wondering admiration at his quicker witted wife, "I expect you are right. What a head you have got, Katie!"

Katie modestly passed over this compliment, and nodded the organ alluded to.

"Of course," she went on, "if Godfrey had had an ounce of sense, he would have insisted on Garlick going on with his investigations, and thus getting to the bottom of the mystery; but men are such donkeys sometimes—especially when they are in love!"

"I know it," ruefully interposed Treherne, at the same time pinching his helpmate's arm. "Only, you see, marriage generally cures that sort of folly, luckily or unluckily."

"Quite true—only Godfrey had not been married quite long enough. If he had only waited a few months longer he would have come to his proper senses—as you have done! However, that's neither here nor there; and instead of acting like a sensible man he has taken himself off to the other end of the world, and there he will stay if we don't contrive to bring him back."

"Bring him back! How on earth are we to manage that?"

"I will tell you, if you'll only listen quietly to me. We must make Garlick go on with his inquiries until he has proved Godfrey innocent—and that can only be done by finding out the guilty person. Afterwards it will all be plain sailing, and Madeline will be wild to run to the end of the world in order to bring her husband back."

Treherne looked slightly dubious, and scratched his head reflectively, as if he thought the process might help him in reasoning out the situation. At last he said,—

"Do you think we are quite justified in interfering, Katie? For my part, I fancy peoples pies are all the better without strange fingers meddling about them."

"I agree with you, as a rule. But this case is an exception to the rule. Remember Madeline's position—lonely, friendless, save for ourselves. Besides, we had something to do with thrusting her into the dilemma in which she now finds herself, and we must be the ones to get her out of it—if we can."

Jack thought this last saving clause a very prudent one. He also admired the large and generous way in which Katie, with her "us" and "we" contrived to include him in a scheme of which she herself assuredly ought to have possessed the honour and glory. But he was humble, and did not remind her of this; and of course he ended by agreeing with her suggestions, and consenting to put Garlick "on the track" once more.

"He'll be delighted to receive instructions to go on with the case," he observed, "for he didn't half like having to leave off just in the middle, as one may say. For my part, I never could understand how it was Godfrey would not consent to let him continue ferretting about, even after the trial was over."

"Yes," said Katie, thoughtfully. "It would have been much better if he had done so, then none of these wretched complications would have ensued. However, I hope things will come out right in the end, but meanwhile you must not breathe a word to Madeline of our project."

Jack promised, and then set off in search of the detective, who chanced to be from home, and was not expected back for another week.

This news slightly damped Katie's hopes. She was one of those impulsive young women who not only say things on the spur of the moment, but are dissatisfied if they cannot *do* them with the same celerity. Possessing her soul in patience was not one of Mrs. Treherne's most prominent attributes, as even her husband was bound to acknowledge.

"Still, a week is not such a very long time," she said to herself, by way of consolation, "and, in the meantime, Jack must take Madeline and me to theatres and concerts, and we must see if we can't drag the poor child out of this horrible dead-alive calm that seems to have fallen upon her."

But the task proved difficult. Madeline was perfectly willing to be taken out, and even made an effort to talk and laugh with Katie, as she used to in the old days, that seemed so far away now! But all her youth appeared to be gone. She could not throw herself into the delights of life with any sort of zest, and Katie came to the conclusion that, for all the enjoyment she got from going out, she might just as well be at home!

And so the days passed on, and at the end of a week Mr. Garlick presented himself, and was received by Jack and his wife—Madeline, of course, being unaware of the detective's arrival.

"This is a rum start!" observed the latter, reflectively, in reference to Godfrey's depar-

ture, and he rubbed his forefinger backwards and forwards on his chin in a ruminative manner, as was occasionally his habit. "I tell you candidly, sir, I don't understand it. Captain Vane looked to me the last person in the world who would cut and run—especially now!"

"Why, 'especially now'?" queried Treherne.

"Well, you see, sir, there's still a good deal of talk about the murder, although it happened some time ago; and people are saying as the magistrates had no business to let the Captain off—that if he had been a poor man instead of a gentleman he would have been sent to take his trial at the assizes. And I've heard, too, that the police are still on the look-out for any fresh evidence that may turn up. They've had their eye on Captain Vane ever since the inquest."

"They haven't got it on him now, at any rate," interposed Katie, sarcastically.

"Why no, ma'am! And I daresay, if the truth were known, they were pretty wild when he bucked it; but, luckily for him, they couldn't prevent his starting, so long as there was no warrant out against him. However, I'll do my best to clear up the mystery, only, of course, it'll be a little more difficult now than if I had gone straight on with the case from the beginning, as I wanted to. I never was more surprised and disappointed in my life than when the Captain gave me a cheque, and told me to let the matter be."

"When did he tell you that?"

"Why, the very day he was acquitted. I waited for him to come out of his sister's lodgings, and then I spoke to him about going on; but he said he thought there was no necessity for it, and the best thing would be to let the matter rest, and so give it a chance of dying out of people's memories. I thought at the time it was a mistake, and a curious line for an innocent man"—here Garlick shot a quick glance at his listeners—"to take; but still it was not my place to say so, and I held my tongue. The Captain was old enough to know his own mind and his own business, and he seemed no fool either in other things."

"You forget that he was just married!" said Katie, quickly, and rendered a little uncomfortable by that glance of Garlick's. "No doubt he was thinking of his wife more than himself."

"Ah! very likely, madam. We all know when people are in love they don't mind making fools of themselves!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN UNEXPECTED SUMMONS.

CHRISTMAS came and went, and still Mr. and Mrs. Treherne stayed on with Madeline.

They had made an effort to get her down to Brackendale for the festive season, but she had shudderingly refused, and Katie felt that the memories the place awoke would be too painful to her just at this moment.

So they did not press her; but when they said something about going home she implored them so piteously to stay that they could not very well refuse.

Accordingly, John took a journey down to Brackendale by himself, just to see that things were going on all right, and returned, bringing with him the nurse and the precious infant who was the joy of his frivolous young mother's heart.

"It will do Madeline good to have baby in the house," Katie observed, with much complacency, as she smoothed the primrose down on the head of her first-born. "She would be more than a woman if she could resist his sweet little ways."

Katie was right. The maternal instinct was strong in Madeline's heart, as it is in every true woman's, and her happiest moments were spent while she nursed the son and heir of the Trehernes, and listened to his heathenish attempts at putting words together.

Meanwhile Garlick had thrown himself heart and soul into his work, and contrived every now and again to report progress to Jack—not at the Queen Anne Villa, for had he put in an appearance there often Madeline would have been pretty sure to see him, and would naturally have wondered what brought him.

To guard against this contingency Jack arranged to meet him at the latter's club, and Katie therefore heard what happened through her husband.

"It seems to me he is very slow!" she grumbled, one day, about three weeks after Christmas. "Here he has been at work over a month, and nothing to show for it!"

"Don't be impatient, my dear! It would not do for him to spoil everything by being too impetuous, and slow and steady wins the race, remember!"

"Don't believe it!" cried Katie, audaciously. "You never won a race in your life!"

He pinched her ear by way of rebuke for this saucy speech, then added,—

"Garlick has got some notion that Chalmers' daughter knows more about the murder than anybody else, and, strangely enough, he can't find her, though he is pretty sure she is in London. He has been down to Deepdene making all sorts of inquiries, but he won't tell me what they have resulted in, although I have an idea he has picked up some important information one way or the other. And now he is going to Brackendale to try and get possession of some boxes that poor Chalmers left at his lodgings. It is possible he may find something to help him amongst the papers!"

"Does he still think a woman committed the murder?"

"Yes, and I fancy it is Ellen Chalmers whom he suspects. He is a clever chap, Garlick, but his temper is queer, and I find the best way is to let him alone, and throw in a word of praise every now and again, for he is as vain as a peacock. I never was so astonished in my life as when he turned up at the club last. I was told a person wanted to speak to me, and I went out, but when I saw him I hadn't the remotest idea who he was; indeed, I thought at first he was an undertaker's mute. His hair was plastered down each side of his face, his cheeks were mottled, and his nose was red. He wore a suit of seedy black, with black kid gloves three sizes too big for him, and boots all crinkled up at the toes, and his face was solemn, and as long as a fiddle. Even when he spoke I didn't recognise him until he asked me what I thought of his disguise; then I roared with laughter—couldn't help it for the life of me!"

To Madeline, the time since Godfrey's departure seemed incredibly long. Some faint hope had lingered in her breast that, in spite of what he had said in his farewell, he would still send her a line to assure her of his safety, or give some idea of his whereabouts.

But no news came; and often, as Madeline lay awake in bed, and the wind howled and whistled round the house, she would shudder as she thought of him tossing about on the wild waves, an alien from home, an outlaw from his native land.

She tried hard to keep up her animosity against him, by telling herself that he had failed in the first principles of honour, and that he deserved his fate, whatever it might be.

But deep down in her soul lay the love that was stronger than herself, and, in spite of her endeavours, it still pleaded for him—even against her better judgment.

"But he did not love me!" cried out her tortured heart. "It was Ellen Chalmers whom he loved. His marriage with me was only one of convenience."

Perhaps this was the bitterest part of her despair, the sting that pierced the deepest, and that nothing could soften.

One evening, when the rain was beating against the windows, and the wind rattled noisily in the chimneys, there came a loud knock at the front door, and presently a servant brought a card to Madeline, which she took with some surprise—for it was nearly ten o'clock, and a visitor at such an hour was a phenomenon.

"Mr. Garlick!" she exclaimed, reading the printed name. "What can he possibly want with me at this time of night?"

Jack and Katie exchanged glances.

"You are sure he inquired for Mrs. Vane?" said the latter, to the servant who was still waiting.

"Quite sure, ma'am."

"He did not ask for Mr. Treherne?"

"Oh, no, ma'am."

"Bring him in here," said Madeline; and she rose from her seat in some excitement, and stood waiting, while she twisted the card nervously about in her fingers, and her colour came and went with fluttering rapidity.

Garlick bowed himself in, but did not speak until the servant had withdrawn; then, after assuring himself that the door was properly closed, he came a step nearer Madeline

"I have brought you a message from a dying woman, ma'am," he said, respectfully. 'It is a job I don't like, for maybe you will think she has no right to send such a message, but she implored me so pitiful like that I could not refuse."

"Who is the woman?" asked Madeline, but she knew what the answer would be.

"Ellen Chalmers, ma'am!"

"Then you have found her at last?" exclaimed Katie, jumping up, and too excited for caution.

A glance from the detective recalled her to herself, and she sat down again, but Madeline had not noticed the question, or what it implied. She was, indeed, too agitated to think of anything except Garlick's mission.

"She is dying, do you say?"

"The doctor doesn't think she'll last another twenty-four hours. It's heart disease of some kind that's the matter with her; but she's quite conscious and sensible now, though it's doubtful how long she may remain so, and she begs you to come to her."

"Do you think you ought to go out on a night?" asked Katie, as she followed our heroine to the door.

Madeline only smiled. It would need something more than bad weather to keep her in when a dying creature begged for her presence.

"At any rate, Jack shall go with you to take care of you," added Katie, decidedly; and accordingly both Treherne and Garlick entered the cab with the young girl, when, having wrapped a fur cloak around her, and changed her shoes, she declared herself ready.

It was an unpleasant evening to be out in. The rain dashed itself noisily against the windows of the four-wheeler—which rattled at if another gust of wind would blow them in—and outside nothing could be seen except the wet, blurred darkness of the January night.

The drive was not a very long one. In less than half-an-hour the cab drew up in front of a small, but neat-looking house, in whose upper windows lights were burning. Garlick got out, and conducted Madeline upstairs, while Jack remained in the cab, solacing his loneliness with a cigar, and quite prepared for any emergency that might arise.

Madeline's heart beat rather more quickly than usual as she found herself in a clean, bare-looking room by the side of a bed on which Ellen Chalmers was lying. The poor woman's face was deadly pale, but her features, clean cut, and delicately chiselled as they were, looked even more beautiful than when Madeline had last seen her. The large, brilliant eyes were clear, and widely opened, and they fixed themselves on Madeline's with a curious intensity as she entered.

"I thought you would come," she murmured, in a low tone. Then raising her voice, she added more sharply to Garlick, "You can go. I want to be alone with this lady."

The detective prudently retired, but it is to be feared that his ear remained glued to

[GODFREY FOUND MADELINE SITTING BY THE FIRE, HOLDING A SCREEN BETWEEN HER FACE AND THE LIGHT.]

the keyhole, during the whole of the interview! As soon as he had gone Ellen turned eagerly to her visitor.

"Come nearer," she said, in a quick whisper. "I have not many hours to live, but I'll try if I can't do some good with the last remnants of my wretched life. Good heavens!" and she clasped her thin hands together, while a groan escaped her lips. "What a miserable, wasted life it has been!"

Madeline knelt by the side of the bed, and, to her credit be it said, that all the bitter thoughts she had cherished towards her rival melted away, at this supreme moment, in a flood of pity for the life that was ebbing so quickly to its end.

"Try not to excite yourself," she said, gently, while she smoothed down the pillows with soft, womanly tenderness. "I will stay with you as long as you wish, but have you no relatives you would like me to send for?"

Ellen shook her head impatiently.

"If I have relations there is not one amongst them who would come to me," she said, with bitterness. "As for friends—well, the only real friend I have ever had was your husband—Godfrey Vane."

Madeline drew back involuntarily, a scarlet flush crossing her face, which Ellen was quick to observe.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, hastily, "you mistake. There is, and never was, anything in Godfrey Vane's friendship for me that need make you blush. He was the truest, kindest, bravest friend in all the world—and the most honourable."

She paused a moment to wipe her lips with a delicate lace-edged handkerchief, whose daintiness seemed somehow out of place in the plainly-furnished room, and then she continued,—

"It was for his sake that I sent for you. I should not have dared so much for my own, though you were very good to me once, and your kindness touched me the more because of my unworthiness. But when I heard that he was going away——"

"You knew of his departure, then?" interrupted Madeline, and in spite of herself, her voice was cold, and had a spice of hauteur in it.

"Yes. I saw him the morning he started."

"And doubtless he told you his destination?"

"No. I asked him where he was going, but he said it was a secret, even from his wife—and then I guessed that he and you were not friendly. You must forgive my saying this, Mrs. Vane, but the poor Captain looked so miserable, so hopeless—as if there was nothing in life that he cared for—so different to his old self!"

"Was it to say this that you sent for me?" queried Madeline, still gently, but in icier tones than before.

"No—no!" exclaimed Ellen, seeing that she had drawn farther away. "I only mentioned it, because I wanted you to understand what put the idea in my mind that you were angry with Captain Vane because of—me!"

She watched her listener's face as she spoke, and again the tell-tale scarlet flamed there. But Madeline did not speak.

"When I came to think matters over," continued the sick girl, while her fingers played nervously with the bedclothes, "I felt sure I was right, and what had puzzled me in your manner before, as I bade you good-bye, was explained. Then I read over the evidence that was given at the examination of the Captain before the magistrates, after my poor father's murder, and I saw that you might easily have grounds for your suspicions of him and me."

"But I never saw the report of the trial!" exclaimed Madeline. "Neither was I permitted to be present at the inquiry."

"Who prevented you?"

"My husband."

"Ah!" said Ellen, thoughtfully. "Then how was it you recognised me when I was at your house—for it was easy to see that you did recognise me?"

"Because I had seen you a week or two before in a hansom cab with Godfrey, driving from Westbourne-grove," was the low-spoken reply.

"Yes. I was with him, but our meeting was the purest accident. I was walking through the Grove, when I was attacked by a fit of giddiness and fainting, just as I was the day you saw me. Captain Vane happened to be passing, and he took me into a shop, and got me some water. Then, as I was quite unable to walk, he gave me his arm, and drove with me to my lodgings."

Madeline looked at her fixedly.

"Is it true that your meeting was accidental?"

Ellen returned the gaze with a sad smile.

"Do you think that near death as I am I would tell a lie? Till that afternoon I had not seen Captain Vane for months—had not spoken to him since the wretched day when I left my old home at Deepdene."

"In company with him?" put in Madeline, keeping her face turned away. "Perhaps it is as well I should tell you at once that I knew he was your lover."

Ellen drew a quick, sobbing breath.

"Yes," she said, putting her hands up to her face, and letting the tears trickle through her fingers. "It is true he was my lover—but not in the sense you mean. Oh, no, no—never that!"

(To be continued.)

A CARPENTER'S right shoulder is almost invariably higher than his left, in consequence of having to use his right arm all the time in planing and hammering. With every shaving his shoulder rises with a jerk, and it finally becomes natural to him to hold himself in that way.

[CLEMENT LED HIS DARLING UP TO THE KIND OLD PEER, SAYING,—"THIS IS MY WIFE, LORD CONROY!"]

NOVELETTE.]

CLEMENT'S BRIDE.

CHAPTER I.

She was the one subject of conversation at The Sycamores on the August morning when her husband's family first heard of her existence.

If ever there were truth in the saying a person's ears burn when they are being discussed, why, Mrs. Dale's ears must have been literally on fire for hours after Lord Alleyne opened the post-bag, for the whole party in the breakfast-room talked of nothing else; and though not a creature among them had seen her, each found something to say against the bride—from Lord Alleyne himself, who declared all colonial girls were fast, to a very sour-faced maiden aunt, who gave it as her opinion that Clement ought never to have had a bride at all, and that the dear fellow was far too good and thoughtful to have plunged headlong into matrimony unless the young lady had led him into the snare by her reckless flirtations.

"Lady!" cried Alice Dale—Clem's eldest sister—"I don't expect there's much of the lady about her. We may think ourselves lucky if Mrs. Clement doesn't drop her h's or make unwonted use of her knife. You needn't call her a lady, Aunt Janey!"

But now the mistress of the house interposed.

Lady Alleyne had been as much put out as any of them at her boy's marriage. She had denounced the bride at once as "a designing girl," but she could not quite hear her son's wife, the woman who some day would bear her own title, described as outside the pale of ladyhood.

"We must make the best of things now, Alice," she said, with a painful stress on the last word; "and remember, please, whatever her antecedents were, the very fact of her being your brother's wife ought to make you mention Mrs. Dale with respect."

Alice shrugged her shoulders.

"Is she to be called that?"

"Of course! It is her proper title. Until you are intimate enough to use her Christian name, she is the Hon. Mrs. Dale to you."

Aunt Janey looked spiteful. She was a tall, thin virgin, with a long face which, somehow, never seemed cheerful.

She was years older than Lady Alleyne, and, if report spoke true, had much resented her brother's marriage—for Clement's mother, though of ancient family, was a penniless bride.

"I don't think the young woman has a Christian name; at least, I should not describe Jasmin as one. Clement might as well have married a wife called honeysuckle or woodbine. There would have been just as much sense in it!"

"Someone will have to write to him," said his father, with a frown. "Alice, just read the letter again slowly, and let me try and see if he gives any reason for his infatuation."

But Lady Alleyne read the letter herself. Perhaps she felt her boy's warm-hearted lines would suffer from Alice's cold-cultured sarcasm.

"My dear Father and Mother,—

"I have seen everything I care about here, and I shall sail for England on the thirty-first of August, reaching home just a fortnight after this letter. And now I have a great piece of news for you. I am not coming alone. I have found a wife out here, and we were married yesterday. It would not have been so soon, only Jasmin's father was dying, and wanted to feel she was safe in my keeping before he died. He only lived an hour after the ceremony. Jasmin is dreadfully cut up, and I am sure the best thing I can do is to bring her home at once. You will love her for my sake until you learn to do so for her own. Don't trouble to meet us at Southampton, as I shall bring her straight on from Plymouth by train.—With love to all,

"Ever your affectionate son,

"Clement."

"I believe the Kaffirs are fond of fantastic names!" said Aunt Janey, kindly. "Perhaps Clem's bride is a lady of colour!"

But a girl who had not yet spoken, who, indeed, had only joined the group in time to hear Lady Alleyne read her son's letter, now came to the rescue.

"I think you are all very unfair to Clem!" she said, frankly. "Hasn't he been the best son and brother in the county? Haven't you said over and over again, Lord Alleyne, he never gave you an hour's anxiety in your life? and that if you could see him suitably married you could die happy?"

"But, my dear Gladys," remarked Lord Alleyne, mildly, "you can't call this a suitable marriage? And——"

"You don't know anything against Mrs. Dale," said Lady Gladys, severely. "There wasn't a word in that letter to imply she isn't charming. I think you are very unjust to Clem to be so prejudiced against his bride!"

Lady Gladys Forde had known Lord Alleyne's family all her life. She had played with the young Dales, and, if truth must be confessed, had squabbled with the girls pretty considerably.

Clem had always been her favourite, and for the last ten years his parents had fondly cherished the hope that some day Gladys and her large fortune would be bestowed upon their eldest son.

The only child of an English earl, the heiress of an estate which joined their own, and of so much money that a little of it would have paid off the mortgages on Lord

Alleyne's property, and left him the full enjoyment of his income.

Clement's bride would not have been so desperately unwelcome if the family had not so fondly hoped to welcome in her place Lady Gladys Forde.

"Perhaps I ought not to have listened," said Gladys, with a charming smile; "but I wanted to see you very particularly, and so I came through the grounds, and in at the French windows, and before I knew what was coming, Lady Alleyne began to read the letter, and I knew that Clem was married."

Boy and girl together, she used his name as naturally as his own sisters might have done. Truth to say, Gladys Forde and her father were quite conscious of their neighbours' wishes respecting her. Perhaps Lord Conroy might have shared his old friends' views, for he was very fond of them and Clement, but he particularly disliked the six Miss Dales, and was of opinion that between his five sisters and their maiden aunt Clem's bride would have rather a rough time of it.

Lady Gladys was twenty-four, just three years younger than Clement Dale. She had been "out" during five London seasons, and had had suitors not a few; but she had returned to Devonshire after each sojourn in Belgravia free and unfettered, and Lord Alleyne had fondly believed, until this morning, that his son had but to ask for her hand and win it.

Lady Gladys drew a chair to the table, and sat down among them. It was impossible to tell from her smiling face that she more than guessed how unwelcome Clem's news had been to his family. She put one hand on Lady Alleyne's sleeve and said, coaxingly,—

"Do tell me all about it?"

"My dear! there is nothing to tell! You heard the letter—we know no more!"

"But surely he had mentioned his wife before! Is she English or a colonist?"

"He never breathed her name before," said Alice, spitefully. "It was a mad idea Clem's going out there as correspondent to an illustrated paper. I always thought harm would come of it."

"I had no money to give my boy," said her father, surely, "and so could hardly complain of his trying to earn some. I own I was afraid Clem might deteriorate among the rough set one hears of at the gold-fields; but I never dreamed of this."

He spoke excitedly, as though he believed civilisation was unknown in South Africa, and the unfortunate Clement had been the only gentleman at the gold-fields; but Gladys knew him thoroughly, and made allowances for his ill-temper.

"Jasmin is a very pretty name," she said, slowly, trying—oh! so hard—to think of something consolatory, and yet not reflecting upon Clement's choice. "I hope Mrs. Dale is as picturesque as her name."

"She is probably a nigger!" said Aunt Janey, who classed under this title all shades of folks not white; "but you will not be troubled by the sight of our misfortune, Lady Gladys. Weak as my brother and sister have always shown themselves, I hope, for the sake of their other children, they will resent Clem's disgraceful conduct by forbidding him the house."

"We can't be expected to associate with a nigger!" said Alice, bitterly. "It would wreck our prospects for ever!"

Aunt Janey could not forbear launching a stab, even at her favourite niece.

"If by 'prospects' you mean your chances of a husband, Alice, I should say they are over. Portionless girls don't often marry after thirty."

Alice looked furious, but discreetly bit her lip and kept silent. Aunt Janey had ten thousand pounds to leave to whom she pleased, and this fact was like charity—it covered a multitude of her sins.

"I think," said David, the second son, a rather obstinate young man of twenty-four, "it would be best if Clem joined with the governor to cut off the entail, and settled on a sheep farm out there. We should feel the disgrace less at a distance."

"He would have to go on to Australia," said Gladys, calmly. "Your ignorance is shocking, David. They don't have sheep-farms where Clem is! They go in for ostriches and diamonds!"

"Will she have any diamonds?" asked Katy, in an awestruck voice, using the pronoun vaguely to describe Clem's bride.

"Not she!" snapped Aunt Janey. "You forget the letter, child. Your brother expressly says he married her so suddenly that her father might know she was provided for before he died. Most likely her father was some old gambler, who had spent his last sixpence in getting to the gold-fields, and would have gone to the workhouse if he had lived."

"They don't have workhouses out there, Miss Dale," said Lady Gladys, shortly. "Well, I must be going home. Your news is so wonderful that it has quite eclipsed mine, or I did think I had something wonderful to tell you."

"What is it, Gladys?" cried Alice and Bertha in a breath. "Any pleasant news would be doubly welcome after our misfortunes!"

Gladys smiled.

"I am not at all sure whether you will call this pleasant, though papa and I are delighted. It is only that Launcelot Forde has come home, and we hope he will be at Ashridge this week."

Launcelot Forde was Lord Conroy's nephew, and heir to the title. There had been an old quarrel between his father and the Earl, and Launcelot had never even seen his uncle.

For the last seven years he had been abroad. Of course, a future Earl was interesting to the five Miss Dales; but, alas! Launcelot would have but an empty title, since all that now went with it would pass at her father's death to Gladys.

"Your cousin!" exclaimed Lady Alleyne, kindly. "I don't wonder at your being excited, Gladys! Why, he is about the only relation you have in the world! I remember his father so well. He was such a handsome man! and he and the Earl were inseparable until the quarrel."

The breakfast-party dispersed. Gladys, who was particularly fond of Lady Alleyne, went with her to the pretty little room where she usually spent her mornings. The "girls" were mostly engrossed in their own pursuits. Since they grew up and came "out" they had not much leisure for their mother.

Gladys loved her society dearly. The gentle lady of the Sycamores did more than anyone else to fill her mother's place.

"I am so glad I have got you all to myself!" she exclaimed, as she wheeled a low chair to the open window for her friend, and sat down on a low stool at her feet, "because I want you to tell me all about it. No, don't look troubled! I don't mean Clement's marriage, but all about the old quarrel between my father and Uncle Forde."

"Would Lord Conroy like it?" asked Lady Alleyne, gently. "I should be sorry to betray anything he wished kept from you, little girl!"

"If you won't tell me I shall have to ask papa himself," returned Gladys; "and I don't want to do that, because I am sure the subject is painful to him! I must know just the main facts before Launcelot comes!"

"It might be better."

"Why did they quarrel?" demanded Gladys; "and why has the quarrel lasted all these years? Papa couldn't have been in the wrong. And, yet, when he told me to-day Launcelot was coming, he said we must do all we could to make up to him for the past!"

"My dear, I had better tell you all I know. When I came home a bride thirty-two years ago your grandfather was alive, and both his sons were living with him at Ashridge. Your father was his favourite. Basil was the most popular in the county. He was remarkably handsome; had a fascinating manner and ready wit. They said he was very wild; but I was only a young girl myself in those days, and could not judge."

"Please go on?"

"My dear, I am afraid of paining you. The Rector of Ashridge was a widower—a gloomy old man with one daughter, whom he sent to school till she was eighteen, and then kept shut up with himself in his lonely home until the poor girl longed for a sight of happier faces. She was very, very beautiful and—in spite of all that happened later—I shall always think good. Your father met her by accident in the park. He fell in love with her, and persuaded the Earl to consent to their engagement."

Gladys interrupted her.

"I always thought my mother was an heiress?"

"So she was. The old Rector was as proud as Lord Conroy himself. The peer had to go in person, and ask Mr. Leslie for his daughter, telling him he would gladly welcome her as Viscountess Forde. Nelly was timidly happy, at least, she seemed so; and as there was no occasion for delay the wedding was fixed for a day six weeks later. Then Basil came home, and was introduced to his future sister. He was far gayer than his brother—younger, and more accustomed to girls' ways. If he had only spoken out I think it would have been better; but Helen was timid, and Basil reckless. He eloped with the Rector's daughter just a week before she was to have married his brother!"

Gladys had the tears in her eyes.

"I wonder papa can consent to receive their son! I am sure I should hate him; and why did we say we must try and make up to Launcelot for the past. I don't see that his parents suffered anything!"

"My dear child, they suffered terribly! Basil Forde had not been bred to any profession. His father was enormously rich, and had no daughters to provide for. A large portion of his property was unentailed. It had been his intention to leave Basil half his savings, and the part of his estates in his power to will away. He was so indignant at his younger son's perfidy that he altered his mind. He cut Basil off without even the proverbial shilling, and left everything to your father."

"I am quite sure papa never took it!"

"He had no choice. When his father died Basil had been married nearly a year. He had failed in everything he undertook, and was in the direst poverty. He believed his brother knew this, and had refused to assist him. He actually accused poor Forde of persuading their father to alter his will! Gladys, dear, I never had a good head for business. I can't make it clear to you, but when my husband came home from the funeral he told me that your father could not have resigned anything to his brother without seeming to plead guilty to the charge Basil had brought against him."

"And what became of Uncle Basil?"

"We were able to help a little. My husband got him a post in the Civil Service. It brought in three hundred a-year, and as all the children, except the eldest boy died, their family was small. Over and over again your father offered assistance. He wished to provide for Launcelot's education, but all help was refused. Basil died when his son was barely twenty, and his widow did not long survive him. Of course, all the influence your father could use indirectly was employed for the boy, and at last he became Secretary to the Governor of Maryland, Sir Joshua Merriton; and he has been with him during his seven years of office. Sir Joshua is sure to be offered another appointment soon, and then no doubt your cousin will again work under him. Anyway, Mr. Forde has made his mark now, and is not likely to be lost sight of.

"I wonder he is willing to come here."

"I do not. Helen Forde always retained a strong sense of the wrong she had done your father, and I think, probably, when she was a widow, she told her son the true story of the quarrel."

"Then he would have come sooner," objected Gladys.

"I doubt it. No doubt he inherits family pride, which would never let him come to Ashbridge as a poor relation. Now, as he has won a position for himself, and does not need patronage, it will be different."

"I am sure I shall detest him!"

Lady Alleyne smiled.

"He ought to be a very charming person. His father was the most fascinating man I ever met, and Helen Leslie was a beauty!"

"I wonder if mamma knew?" said Gladys, thoughtfully.

"Yes," replied Lady Alleyne. "She was an old friend of the Forde family, and unless I mistake, she had given her heart to your father before ever he met Miss Leslie. You need not grieve for her, my child. I am positive she would far rather have been your father's wife and the consoler of his disappointment than the passionately loved first choice of another man."

"Well," said Gladys, rising with a little sigh, "it is time for me to go home. Thank you very much, Lady Alleyne. I am sure it is a great mistake for people to fall in love. It brings nothing but trouble."

"Don't say that, Gladys. Love is worth far more than the pain it sometimes brings."

Gladys shook her head.

"I don't think so."

"You would not like a loveless life, my dear?" persisted her kind old friend. "I don't think you would care to become a soured disappointed woman like Aunt Janey!"

"Good gracious, no!" cried Lady Gladys, in most unfeigned alarm; "and now I really must go home to papa. Good bye, dear Lady Alleyne."

She said no word of that old time history she had been listening to as she greeted her father; but luring him out on to the verandah she gave him a long and detailed account of Clement's offence, and the cruel comments made by his sisters on his bride.

"I declare, papa, I felt as though I could never like the girls again, and Aunt Janey was worse than any of them. She actually insinuated that Mrs. Dale might be a Kaffir!"

Lord Conroy laughed till the tears stood in his eyes, and then said,—

"I feel very sorry for her."

"Miss Dale?" queried his daughter. "I don't think you need be."

"No. Mrs. Clement Dale. I should say coming to The Sycamores would be a terrible ordeal for her, and though Clem's a good fellow, he never had much backbone. He'll be true to his wife, but he won't be able to protect her against spiteful tongues."

"I don't think she'll come to The Sycamores. Miss Dale declared she would never meet her, and the girls considered it would be an insult to them to have Mrs. Dale foisted on them."

Lord Conroy smiled.

"I wonder those young ladies are not more careful."

"Why, papa?"

"Their father is getting in years, and the moment he dies everything will be theirs."

"Everything?"

"Everything! The property is dreadfully encumbered, but the entail is stint enough. Lady Alleyne was married without a settlement. The moment poor Alleyne dies the African bride will be mistress of The Sycamores, and if she took my advice she would make a clean sweep of its living inhabitants."

"Not Lady Alleyne, papa, she is so sweet!"

"My dear Gladys, where are your eyes? Don't you know that one of Lady Alleyne's daughters has a lover, and if it wasn't for the over-weening family pride the poor little thing would be married directly!"

"I suppose you mean Dr. Hastings?"

"I do. He has asked Lord Alleyne for Kitty, and been insultingly refused; but he is sure of his lady-love's constancy, and does not lose heart. Depend upon it, if Alleyne does not give in by the time Katy is twenty-one, the young couple will take the law into their own hands. He has spoken very plainly to me—Hastings, I mean—and he says he should have pressed his suit further, only he fears to distress Lord Alleyne in his present state of health. He has a good practice, and can give little Kitty a home worthy of her. He says he is quite prepared to take care of her mother, but that not one of the elder sisters should join his *ménage*. So you see, Gladys, the four Misses Dale will be completely at Mrs. Clement's mercy."

"There is Aunt Janey!"

"Shall I tell you a secret, Gladys? Jane Dale is a thoroughly selfish woman, and some years ago she sank all her money in a life annuity, which makes her far richer while she lives, but leaves her nothing to bequeath."

I thought she was so very rich?"

"Well, my dear, when a woman has turned fifty, and spends ten thousand pounds on a life annuity, she is apt to get a good return for her money. Anyway, Gladys, that is the truth about it!"

"And how came you to know?"

"She called here to consult me as to what office she should go to. I pointed out to her that with her mother's estate mortgaged to the hilt she ought to think of her own family, but she was obdurate."

"I am quite sure the girls don't know. Alice expects to be her aunt's heiress; and Bertha told me Aunt Janey's property was so well invested that it brought her in almost fabulous interest!"

"Well, don't undeceive them, my dear. If they like to pay court to their aunt for the sake of her money-bags just let them—only it 'll be a bitter awakening!"

"Poor Clem!"

"Aye, he'll have his hands full. The only thing to hope is that Aunt Janey may live to be a hundred; otherwise Clem and his wife will be heavily handicapped."

"How much is Lord Alleyne's income?"

"About eighteen hundred after the interest of the mortgages is paid; and I daresay he often has to spend two or three hundred on repairs. The property is in a very bad condition. On the whole, Gladys, I feel thankful you and Clem did not fancy each other!"

Gladys laughed.

"I'm very fond of Clem, but I never wanted to marry him, papa. I should like to be kind to his wife. Couldn't we have her here, and make much of her?"

Lord Conroy smiled.

"We'll see about it, little girl."

"And papa," suggested Gladys, thoughtfully, "you know you mean to do something for Launcelot. He will be quite rich enough to marry, won't he?"

"If he accepts my help, Gladys. If not, I suppose I must wait and leave it to him in my will. People sometimes take from the dead what they reject from the living. Why do you ask?"

"He is just thirty, isn't he?"

"Thirty last month."

"How very nice it would be if he were to marry one of Clem's sisters!"

"Gladys," said her father, with mock severity, "you are quite heartless in your feelings towards your cousin. Is it carrying your charity to the unknown Jasmin too far to sacrifice poor Launcelot to one of those dressed up dolls. Why, they are all older than Clement except Kitty and the twins!"

"The twins are only twenty-six," returned Gladys, "and I am sure they are very stylish-looking girls."

"Very—and they have about as much heart as a fashion plate. Don't trouble your pretty head about match-making, Gladys," added her father proudly, "depend upon it, my dear, it is best to leave such things to Providence. If I thought otherwise I should have been looking out for a suitable son-in-law ages ago!"

CHAPTER II.

With August the stream of passengers in the great mail steamers between Africa and England begins to diminish. Colonists know too well by experience or hearsay the vagaries of the English winter, and do not care to reach the mother country when her summer is almost a thing of the past; and so, when Mr. Clement Dale resolved to bring his bride home in the *Spaniard*, which left Table Bay on the thirty-first of August, he had not the slightest difficulty in securing their passage.

Clement was utterly unlike his sisters and the cold, calculating David. He had far more of his mother's nature than any of her other children.

He had met on his travels an invalid gentleman and his daughter, and had been interested in them first from pure compassion for Mr. Lyle's sufferings.

Then he had discovered Jasmin Lyle's was the sweetest face he had seen, and had forthwith drifted hopelessly into love, never pausing to consider his parents' prejudices nor the dire necessity of his marrying for money, which had been taught him from his youth up.

He knew nothing whatever of the Lyles' antecedents. He met them staying at an "Hotel;" but as everyone does stay at an hotel in that particular town, this hardly had the same importance as the same fact would have had in England.

That Mr. Lyle was a gentleman, and that his daughter had been bred up in refinement, Clem knew by instinct, but he believed them to be poor.

Jasmin wore the simplest, plainest of dresses. She and her father never willingly alluded to their past life or their English acquaintance. It was as though they lived entirely in the present, and needed no friends but each other.

Mr. Lyle took a fancy to Clement, and asked him point-blank if he was likely to remain long in the colony. Clem told him frankly he had come out on a three months' visit as artist to an illustrated paper, and that he hoped to find more work of the same kind when he got home—for his father being that unfortunate individual, the owner of a much-encumbered estate, could not afford even to make him an allowance.

"My godmother left me two hundred a-year," said Clem, cheerfully, "and I generally manage to make as much more by my pencil. I suppose it's a very humble income for a nobleman's eldest son; but I can get along on it, and it's better than bothering my father when I know how poor he is!"

"Much better. I honour you, Mr. Dale, more than I can say, for you have an independent spirit."

"If you honour me," pleaded Clem, "will you trust me? I have confessed to you that I am a poor man, but I am young and strong, and in time I shall get on. My Lyle, will you give me your daughter? You have said you shrank from the thought of her being, perchance, left friendless in this distant land. I love her with all my heart and strength, and if only you will let her become my wife I will guard her from every sorrow."

Mr. Lyle looked bewildered.

"Have you spoken to Jasmin?"

"No," said Clem, simply. "I would not until I had your consent."

"She is a mere child," said the dying man, gravely. "I never thought of her being married yet."

"She will grow older every day," urged Clement; "and oh! sir, think how terribly friendless she will be in this place if anything happens to you?"

"And in England, too," replied Mr. Lyle. "I have never made many friends. I led a

reserved, lonely life, and Jasmin has done the same."

"Let her be my wife?" pleaded Clement, "if only I can win her consent. I love her dearly; and though I am not a rich man, surely, sir, she will be safer and happier with me than working for her own living? She is too beautiful, too lovely, to become one of the great army of women who toil for daily bread!"

Clem was so excited that he never noticed something like a smile cross Mr. Lyle's face. Yet there was hardly anything amusing in the young man's arguments. Geoffrey Lyle stretched out his feeble hand and pressed Clem's in a warm clasp.

"You would be content, then, to marry a penniless girl and cherish her?"

"Content! I should be too thankful. You don't know how I love Jasmin, sir. I have never cared for anyone before. She is my first love, and she will be my last."

"And your family?" pursued Mr. Lyle. "What will they say to your marrying a nobody—the penniless child of a dying man?"

Clem never tried to conceal that they would not like it.

"I have never cost my father anything since I left Oxford, sir, and I should not expect him to make us an allowance. I am hoping you would let Jasmin begin life on such means as I could provide. My godmother's legacy is invested in the funds—six thousand pounds. I should settle that on Jasmin before our marriage. I think we should get along."

"And I am sure you would," said Geoffrey Lyle, earnestly. "If you come back to-night you shall see Jasmin, and ask her what you will."

The dying man himself broached the subject to his child.

"It is what I always hoped for, Jasmin, that you should be wooed by one worthy of you. Clement Dale has a heart of gold."

The girl's fair face flushed.

"He is all that is brave and true; but, father, must you leave me?"

"I must, dear, and soon. Let me see you Clement's wife before I die."

"And you will tell him?"

"No, my darling. I shall tell him nothing. When you are back in England will be time enough for the revelation. You can prove his people first. Go to them, and see how they receive you before you tell Clement of Monkton, and the happy days you and I have spent there. Do not look so frightened, dear! You are not deceiving him, for he has asked you no questions, and I would rather the secret was kept until the end."

Clement came back and pleaded his cause. He told Jasmin frankly while his father lived they must be content with a small income but she only smiled.

"I am not afraid of poverty."

"And, darling, you will come to me soon. You will let your father see you my wife before he goes away?"

So they were married in one of the August days, which are so pleasant in the brief African spring. It was a very simple wedding. There were no presents, or bridesmaids, or wedding-cake, and the shadow of coming trouble mingled even with their joy; but Clem was happy, even though he felt that far away in England there were those who would condemn his choice.

Mr. Lyle died the next day. By a will hastily executed, he bequeathed "all he died possessed of" to his only child Jasmin, and Clement discovered that there was nearly two hundred pounds in ready-money. He had about the same in the bank, so that after the funeral expenses were defrayed, and the cost of the double passage to England deducted, he and Jasmin would boast about two hundred and fifty pounds—enough to furnish a small house; and then he must speedily seek some profitable employment for his busy pencil.

They stayed in Cape Town over a week, and Jasmin provided herself with suitable mourning, choosing, however, only the most indispensable articles, as she preferred to get the rest in England.

"We shall live in London, I suppose, Clem?" she asked, the night before they sailed. "Do you know I love it better than any place in the world!"

"I think London must be our headquarters, Jasmin. I am glad you have lived there already, dear, for country-bred people generally pine in the wilderness of bricks and mortar, and I am afraid we shall not be able to afford a very rural suburb."

"I don't mind if we live in the city," said Jasmin, cheerfully. "We never really made our home in London, Clem; only papa used to have to go up on business, and then he always took me."

"And where was your home, sweetheart?" asked Clem, fondly. "Some day you must take me to see it, if it is not too far from London."

Jasmin shook his head.

"I am afraid it is too far, Clem. We lived in Yorkshire, close to Whitby."

"And," he hesitated to put the question plainly, "what was your father?" but Jasmin understood his thought and answered it.

"Papa wrote books," she said, slowly. "I don't think one of them succeeded, but he loved writing them. His publisher used to say he was in advance of his age."

Clearly Mr. Lyle was a literary man, who without ever making a "hit" had contrived to earn enough to live in comfort. Most likely, when his health failed, and he was ordered abroad, he sold his furniture, and gave up his home to provide means for the journey. Poor fellow, it must have been hard.

Jasmin accidentally confirmed the mistake.

"The publisher was so kind when we went to say good-bye to him. He told me he was sure papa would get better, and come home again to write more books. Papa only smiled and shook his head. I believe from the first he thought he should never return from Africa. He only undertook the journey for my sake."

The *Spaniard* was a fine vessel, and the Dales had good quarters.

There were few passengers on board; and though both Jasmin and her husband had spent some months travelling in Africa, it chanced strangely that neither of them had ever met one of the party on the *Spaniard* before.

Jasmin, with her sweet, spiritual beauty, was a general favourite, and most people thought the Honourable Clement Dale a very fortunate man to have won so fair a wife.

When they reached Madeira Clem's impatience knew no bounds, for he had calculated that letters from home would be waiting there in reply to his announcement of his marriage.

There came almost a fear in his wife's heart as they steamed slowly in sight of the lovely islands.

"Clem!" she whispered, slipping one hand into his, "dear Clem! Supposing they are angry?"

The smile with which he answered her was quite reassuring.

"Then, my dear, I shall be more thankful than ever that you are my wife! Had we been only engaged, Jasmin, you are such a proud child, you might have thrown me over; but nothing can part us now!"

"Then you are not anxious?"

"I would rather, of course, that my people received you kindly. But, Jasmin, dearest, nothing really matters so that I have you! I explained to your father just how things were, and he was content that we should depend on my earnings for the present."

Jasmin smiled.

"If they ask us to The Sycamores I shall be terribly frightened!"

"Of course they'll ask us!" said Clem, confidently. "Why, Jasmin, we almost pass Ashridge in getting from Plymouth to London. They couldn't let us be so near without paying them a visit!"

"Please don't stay long!" implored Jasmin.

He smiled at her vehemence.

"I don't think we can spare them very long," he replied, cheerfully. "I want to be in London on the first of October."

"And we're not due at Plymouth before the twentieth of September?"

"No. You'll try and like them, won't you, Jasmin, for my sake? The girls are not your sort, dear; but you'll be fond of my mother, everyone is; and the governor is not a bad old fellow!"

"And your brother?"

"I never profess to understand David. In age he is three years younger than I am, but in everything else he is older than the governor."

"And does he live at home doing nothing?"

Clem winced.

His own opinion was that David ought to have followed his own example, and buckled to; but no one else at The Sycamores seemed to think so.

"To tell you the truth, Jasmin, David's a difficult customer. He's intended for a land agent, but my mother won't let him go to Ireland for fear he should be shot; and he makes objections to any place in England he thinks too remote. Then he values his services rather higher than other people seem to do, and all these causes combine to keep him idle."

"I'm afraid I shall not like him, Clem."

"Never mind, dear. I'm quite ready to confess David is not a very taking individual."

They dropped anchor. A boat with the Portuguese flag boarded the ship. The company's agent and the mails followed. As soon as these were sorted on a table in the saloon the passengers hurried down to get their letters.

Jasmin detained her husband a moment, and whispered,—

"Clem, remember one thing. If the letters are not kind—they will have been written in great haste."

"Why?"

"The African mail would not reach Ashridge before Tuesday. To ensure our finding letters here they would have to be posted by Thursday at latest. Keep up your spirits, Clem, even if in the first flush of their vexation, Lord and Lady Alleyne have written in anger. If you despond I shall be perfectly miserable."

Clem answered by a kiss. No one was looking. Then he took his wife to a quiet corner of the quarter-deck, almost deserted now, as everyone was below looking for their letters, or else hurrying to go on shore.

"You promise not to open one until you come back to me?" urged Jasmin.

"I promise."

He was not gone long, and when he returned he brought two letters with their seals intact, but his face was grave and perplexed as he sat down beside his wife.

"This is for you," and he gave her the thicker of the two letters. "Mine is from the governor. I can't make it out that there is nothing from my mother."

Jasmin looked at the address. "The Honourable Mrs. Dale," written in clear, round characters, and then noticed that the post-mark was "Ashridge."

"Perhaps this is from Lady Alleyne?" she suggested, hopefully. "I know no one near Ashridge. Besides, none of my friends will have heard I am married."

"It is not my mother's writing, but open it and see. I confess I am rather bewildered they should have written to you."

Jasmin found two sheets of notepaper within the envelope. The first was signed "Yours most truly, Gladys Forde," and she found it a very pressing invitation for her and

Clement to visit her correspondent at Ashridge.

"Papa is Lord Alleyne's nearest neighbour," wrote Lady Gladys, "and your husband has been like an elder brother to me all my life. We are longing to make your acquaintance. And if you will come to Ashridge we will both do our utmost to make you feel at home. They are such a large party at The Sycamores that it is just possible they may not be able to receive you, and we live so near that you will see all your husband's old friends while staying with us, and I shall be delighted to have a companion."

The other note was to Clement, and written by Lord Conroy himself, a rare honour, for the Earl rarely corresponded with anyone, usually employing Gladys as his amanuensis.

"My dear Clem,—

"Bring your wife to see us, and we will do our best to make her happy. I am afraid the atmosphere at The Sycamores is cloudy, but I can promise you fair weather at Ashbridge.—Yours ever, "Conroy."

Clement did not show this note to his wife, although she dutifully gave him the one from Lady Gladys.

"I am sure I shall like her," said Jasmin, simply. "Why did you never mention her, Clem?"

"I hardly know. Lady Gladys Forde has been just like one of ourselves for years. She is twenty-four, and considered pretty. Unfortunately she is a great heiress, and terribly afraid of being married for her money."

"I wonder you did not marry her, Clem? Perhaps your parents wished it?"

"If they did, Gladys and I never gave them any reason to think they would have their desire. I can't explain it to you, Jasmin. I like Gladys better than all my sisters, and yet I should as soon have thought of marrying one of them as of proposing to her, and I am sure she feels the same!"

"Shall we go there, Clem?" asked Jasmin, gravely. "Do you know what I think. I fancy from this letter Lady Gladys fears your parents are angry, and has invited us lest we should not be welcome at The Sycamores."

"We'll go to Ashridge before we leave the neighbourhood, but our first visit ought to be to my own people."

"If they have room," said Jasmin, quietly. "Hadn't you better read your father's letter."

Clem opened it hastily, read it through, tore it in fragments, and scattered them over the side of the ship into the water. His face was darker than Jasmin had ever seen it, and she turned to him with a little cry.

"Oh, Clem! What is the matter?"

"Nothing that need trouble you, sweetheart! I think, Jasmin, I will telegraph to the Earl that we accept his invitation."

She did not ask him "why?" She agreed that the telegram should be sent, and watched him while he wrote out the brief message:

"Thank you. Coming."

"You will not mind," he said to his wife, almost pleadingly. "You would rather go to London, I daresay; but, Jasmin, I can't bear the idea that my wife should pass my birthplace without being seen and known by my old friends. I can trust Gladys and the Earl to give you the kindest of welcomes."

"And I want to see Lady Gladys. I am quite content to go to Ashridge; but, Clem, you had better tell me what your father said. I shall have to hear some day, and I would rather get it over."

"I think my father has gone out of his mind," said Clem, cheerfully. "Do you know, Jasmin—don't be horrified—he actually seems to think you are coloured!"

For a moment Mrs. Dale stared at him in amazement; then, as the truth dawned on her, she broke into a peal of silvery laughter, in which Clem finally joined.

"It is too delicious. Pray am I a Kaffir or a Zulu? Oh, Clem, what could you have said about me to make him fall into such a blunder?"

"He actually suggests," went on Clem, with a twinkle in his eye, "that I should join with him in cutting off the entail, place David in my shoes, and with a little ready money start as a sheep farmer in Australia, where, he believes, people are not so particular respecting coloured blood."

He looked at his wife—a tall, slender girl, with a pure creamy skin tinged with the faintest of wild-rose bloom. Her brown eyes were large and almost pathetic in their earnestness, the depths looking like velvet. She wore a black cashmere gown, following every line of her graceful figure; and her hair, the brightest and darkest shade of gold, was plaited in coils round her head.

"If he could only see you, Jasmin!" breathed Clem. "I am sure he would feel ashamed of himself. Fancy you a Kaffir!"

"I am not half fat enough," said Jasmin, who persisted in keeping to the comic side of Lord Alleyne's mistake. "Weight and width are the two essentials of beauty among the Kaffirs. Clem, don't look so miserable, please!"

"I feel as though you had been insulted."

"Never mind. I suppose Lord Alleyne intended us to go off to the sheep farm without putting in an appearance at The Sycamores."

"Yes. He thinks it would spoil the girls' chances if it got about that they had a savage for a sister-in-law."

"Well, Clem, I think Lady Gladys and her father extremely brave people to venture to invite us. But, pray what chances have your sisters?"

"Chances of marriage."

"Oh!"

"Which, I confess, are strictly limited," went on Clem, quietly. "Alice is thirty-one, and Bertha not two years younger."

"And I am nineteen!"

"The youngest of the family. Even Kitty has left her teens behind her. She is just twenty."

"Well," said Jasmin, "perhaps Lady Gladys will invite your mother to Ashridge, and show her I am not very brown. Come, Clem, let us cheer up. I mean to enjoy myself very much at Lord Conroy's, and you must not mind this for me, dear. I assure you I shall not bear malice, and some day perhaps your father will change his mind."

CHAPTER III.

A tall, foreign-looking man stood in the morning-room at Ashridge in close conversation with its mistress.

Gladys Forde wore a tailor-made costume of blue serge, a plain linen collar and cuffs relieving its rather sombre hue. Her brown hair was dressed in elaborate coils, her blue eyes danced with merriment, and her face was as bright as health and good temper could make it, though, truth to say, she was having a rather warm discussion with her Cousin Launcelot, who had now been a guest at Ashridge for over ten days, and who had speedily won a large place in Lord Conroy's heart, though he seemed to be always sparring with Lady Gladys.

"I think you are making a great mistake," Mr. Forde said, judicially, "if Lord and Lady Alleyne think their son's wife an improper person to be received, it is not courteous to bring her under their notice by inviting her to stay within a walk of their house."

"Be easy," said Gladys, mockingly. "I believe colonial girls are not fond of walking, but if I find Jasmin bent on pedestrian exercise I shall take care to turn her steps always in the opposite direction to The Sycamores. I am happy to say, Launcelot, we possess more than one sitting-room, so that if the Dales come to call they will not be forced to meet the bride; while, as to church-going, I doubt if the happy pair will remain over Sunday."

"And if she turns out hopelessly vulgar?"

"She won't! You don't know Clem. He couldn't choose a wife who wasn't a lady."

"Well, I think you run a great risk."

"And we have exposed you to it," cried Gladys, with comic penitence. "I am so sorry, Launcelot; but if, after all, you find Mrs. Dale too vulgar for you to associate with, I know Lady Alleyne will welcome you for the few days our house is molested by such low society. You can't complain that the Miss Dales are vulgar!"

"They are extremely well-bred, sensible girls. I like them remarkably!"

"And which do you like best?"

"The youngest."

"That's no use! Try again."

"I don't understand," said Launcelot, huffily. "I prefer Miss Kathleen to her sisters! Why do you say that is no use?"

"Because Dr. Hastings prefers Kitty, not only to her sisters, but to all the world! I think Lord Alleyne would give you any one of his five daughters, but Kitty would refuse to be given."

"Gladys, you are too absurd. You think of nothing but marrying."

"Papa generally says I don't think enough of it; but, seriously, Launcelot, the Dales are nice girls."

"Very nice!"

"And you are turned thirty, and it must be time you married."

"Gladys, you are as bad as my dear old chief. Sir Joshua spent all his leisure time in seeking eligible young ladies, and then extolling their perfection to me."

"Well, he was a great deal too good to you. Now, it is nearly time for the carriage to come back, so I shall go to the drawing-room and watch for them. You can have tea in the library if you object to meet the bride!"

"Her name was Jasmin, wasn't it? Sounds rather romantic!"

"She ought to be pretty, with such a name. I never knew a Jasmin before!"

"I did once."

"In Maryland. What was she like?"

"Before I went to Maryland. She was a child of twelve or less. My mother and I were at Whitby one summer, and her father had a lovely estate close by. I knew him very slightly, and he brought his child to see my mother. I have never quite forgotten her face. It was the loveliest I ever met."

"Seven years ago. Why she must be quite grown up by now!"

"And married most likely," said Launcelot, "only I can't fancy Sir Geoffrey getting on without her. She was just the light of his eyes."

"I hear the carriage," said Gladys, severely. "Unless you feel equal to an introduction to Clement's bride you had better make yourself scarce," and Launcelot took the advice.

The Earl and his daughter went into the hall to receive their guests.

Clement led his darling up to the kind old peer, and said, simply,—

"This is my wife, Lord Conroy. I thank you in her name and my own for your letter. It was our only welcome home."

"You are to be congratulated Clem!" said the Earl, warmly, as he pressed a fatherly kiss on Jasmin's forehead, and then made way for Gladys, who received her guest with a caress that had in it something wonderfully motherly—wonderful for one so young.

"Tea is quite ready. Will you come and have some, or should you rather see your rooms first?"

Jasmin preferred the latter plan, so Lady Gladys led the way upstairs.

"I am so glad you could come to us!" she said, gently, as she closed the door, and with her own fingers began to unfasten her guest's cloak; "but I am afraid it is a blow to you both that Lady Alleyne did not insist upon you going to her."

Jasmin smiled.

"I think Clem minds. I don't. I was so frightened when I heard he had five sisters, all I know so little of young ladies."

"You have been like me," said Gladys, "an only daughter and motherless. I think we ought to be friends, Jasmin, if only because our fate has been the same!"

The tears welled up into Jasmin's brown eyes.

"I thought it would have broken my heart when papa died," she whispered. "He was all I had until we met Clem!"

"Was he ill long?" asked Gladys, feeling it better she should know a little of her new friend's past history.

"Nearly a year. The doctors thought the sea voyage and the African climate would cure him; but I know he never believed it quite. He only left England because he could not bear to neglect any hope for my sake!"

"Then you are English born and bred? Do you know I always said so?"

Jasmin smiled.

"Clem says his father thought I was a Kaffir; but until a year ago I had never even been out of England."

"And I suppose you will live in London? Clem has spent most of his time there for years."

"He talks of taking a little house," said Jasmin, brightly. "We have enough money to furnish it and start us. Lady Gladys, when I have a home of my own, will you come and see me, though it will be a very different home from your beautiful Ashridge? Clem and I shall welcome you so gladly!"

"I'll come," said Gladys, warmly; "and now, please, I want to ask you two things. May I call you Jasmin, and go on saying Clem; or would you like me to be stiff and formal, and address you as Mr. and Mrs. Dale?"

"Clem and Jasmin, please!" said the bride, "I like it so much better!"

"Then that's settled. Now the other question is more difficult. What would you like to do about The Sycamores?"

"I don't understand!" said Jasmin, rather helplessly. "I don't want to go there!"

"No! But would you like me to bring about an accidental meeting? I could do it easily, you know; and I am sure when they once saw you they would be friendly."

Jasmin shook her head.

"If I am to decide I should prefer not to see any member of my husband's family, unless they deliberately wished to meet me. If they want to make my acquaintance they will call on me. If not, I prefer to remain a stranger."

"And I think you are quite right. Now I must leave you, and go and dress. Shall I send my maid to help you unpack? We dine at seven!"

"I would rather unpack for myself!" said Jasmine, and then she was left alone.

Launcelot Forde left his room earlier than usual that evening, for he wanted a word with his cousin in the drawing-room before her guests appeared; but he had hardly gained the long corridor when he heard the soft *frou-frou* of a woman's dress, and knew that he was about to meet the unwelcome bride, "the savage who bewitched Clem into marrying her," as his family described Mr. Dale's choice.

Another moment, and they were face to face. Despite the long, silken train, the womanly attire, he recognised his little friend of seven long years before. It was Jasmin Lyle, Sir Geoffrey's heiress, the child who had brightened the last weeks of his mother's life.

And how beautiful she was! Her white neck and rounded arms gleamed like marble through her crêpe bodice. She had not a single ornament except a white rose in the golden coils of her hair. For a moment the young man quite forgot Clement Dale's marriage, and the fact that his wife was called Jasmin, and he suddenly exclaimed,—

"Miss Lyle!"

"Mr. Forde!"

"Are you staying with my uncle?"

"Yes; but I am not Miss Lyle. Has not your cousin Gladys told you of her old friend, Clement Dale, and his sudden marriage?"

"But you can't be his wife!"

"I am, indeed!" she said, with a strange note of joy in her voice. "I am Jasmin Dale, but I have not forgotten my old home at Monkton Priory, nor the happy days I spent with your mother seven years ago. She and my father are together now in their last home. For their sakes, Mr. Forde, will you do me a great favour?"

"Willingly—gladly!"

"It is only this. When my father left England in search of health he dropped his title. We had no maid or servant with us. We lived very quietly, making no friends or acquaintances. When Clement Dale asked me to be his wife he believed that my father's death would leave me a penniless girl, alone in the world."

Launcelot's eyes flashed.

"And he does not know?"

"He has no idea. It was my father's wish I should not tell him until we were in England, and I had seen what reception I met with from his family. I should be very troubled if my husband learned the news from anyone but me; and so please, Mr. Forde, I want you to meet me as a stranger."

The sound of footsteps startled them, and they parted. Jasmin walked on towards the grand staircase—Launcelot hurried back to his own room. Clement Dale had fancied he heard his wife's voice, but decided he was mistaken. He hastened on, and joined her as she entered the drawing-room.

Dinner was announced almost at once, and Lady Gladys had only just time to make her cousin known to her two guests. Mr. Forde was obliged to walk in to dinner alone, there being no third lady for him to escort; but he was rewarded by a seat between Jasmin and her hostess, immediately opposite Clement Dale, and thus had ample opportunity to watch his neighbours.

"The greatest comedy out," was his silent reflection. "The young man is evidently deeply in love—as, of course, he should be—but he fancies he thinks he is acting the part of a modern King Cophetua. I should like to see his face when he discover his 'beggar maid' is a greater heiress than my cousin Gladys. As for those girls at The Sycamores, I think they will be ready to tear their hair. The idea of Gladys thinking one of them would suit me as a wife! No, if ever I marry I should want someone not quite so narrow-minded, but I confess I am in no hurry to enter the holy estate. I am like Gladys herself—fancy free."

CHAPTER IV.

"I CALL it disgusting!"

"Execrable taste!"

"Clem ought to be ashamed of himself!"

These three remarks came from three of Clem's sisters the morning after that prodigal (not repentant, though, by any means) had returned to his native county.

The family at The Sycamores had been much aggrieved when they knew that Lord Conroy had invited the erring couple to Ashridge; but they had hoped to the last minute that Clem would have too much sense of the fitness of things to force his wife into their vicinity after his father's very plain and explicit letter.

Aunt Janey, who never shirked her duty—and rather enjoyed it when it made her do something disagreeable—had sent a telegram to her nephew at Plymouth, couched in these severe terms:—

"Do not disgrace your family! Go straight on to London!"

It so happened that this bright, interesting message never reached Clem, as he had left the ship before it arrived, and by some mistake he had left no address, so that in course of time it found its way back to The Sycamores.

But this morning it had not returned from its fruitless wanderings, and Aunt Janey firmly believed it had reached Clem. The storm of indignation was chiefly due to his having dared to disregard it.

"Perhaps they have not come, after all?" said Lady Alleyne, gently. "I do not think myself Clem would willingly pain us."

"Clem's only wax in her hands, I expect," said his father, sharply, "or else he would have replied to my letter. It required an immediate answer."

"They have come," said Kitty, with the air of one who has made a great discovery, "for Dr. Hastings was at the station yesterday, and he saw them."

One of the servants at The Sycamores was ill, and Kathleen Dale had met the doctor as he left The Sycamores, which explained her being in receipt of this information.

"And what was she like?"

"Tall and thin," replied Kitty, quoting her lover's exact words. "But he could not see anything else, because she wore a thick crêpe veil, and a long cloak from head to foot. Of course she would be in mourning for her father."

"I think Dr. Hastings might have found out something more," said Aunt Janey, crossly. "Why didn't he speak to them? A doctor can associate with anyone."

"It does not matter," returned Alice, calmly, "for Mr. Forde promised to come over to tennis this afternoon; and, of course, he will be able to give us a full description of his fellow guests. He thinks it was very ill-judged of Gladys to ask them."

"He is never fair to Gladys," said Lady Alleyne, quickly. "I am very sorry they seem to get on so badly."

Four pair of eyes looked at the gentle mother with displeasure. But it was left for Aunt Janey to reprove the mistress of the family openly.

"Really, Lady Alleyne, you have most extraordinary sentiments for a mother! You should think of your own girls before other people's. Why should Lady Gladys be wished to engross the one eligible man in the neighbourhood? Launcelot Forde will be Earl of Conroy in a few years, and his uncle intends to leave him all the property that is not entailed on Gladys. He will have five thousand a-year if he has a penny!"

"I am sure I do not grudge it him," replied Lady Alleyne, "but I would rather he was more friendly with Gladys. I hoped he would be a brother to her, poor child!"

"And I hope he will marry one of my nieces," said Aunt Janey, briskly, "and be a brother to the other four. Lady Gladys can get on well enough. She is an heiress!"

Alice and Bertha looked as though they fully endorsed their aunt's sentiments. The twins declared that Mr. Forde must be wretched at Ashridge while "that creature" was there, and that they thought mamma had far better to ask him over to spend a few days at The Sycamores.

But gentle as she seemed, there were times when Lady Alleyne was stung into asserting herself, and this was one.

"I shall do nothing of the sort," she said, decidedly. "I am a mother, as Aunt Jane has just reminded me, and I will not put such an insult on my son as to suggest to a stranger that Clement's presence at Ashridge makes it an unfit abode for him."

"You never think of your daughters!" said Alice, sharply.

"If you mean I never scheme to get husbands for them you are right," replied Lady Alleyne, gravely. "Girls, I would far rather see you all working honestly for your bread than descend to such a disgraceful fashion; and you seem to forget, when you denounce Clement's wife as a scheming adventuress, that you are willing to become the same!"

Mr. Forde kept his appointment. It was

not four o'clock when he appeared at The Sycamores. He had ridden over, and his horse was taken round to the stables, while he joined the ladies on the lawn.

There was such a yearning look on Lady Alleyne's face that the young man guessed how much she longed for news of her son, and decided had his mother had her way Mr. and Mrs. Dale would have been welcomed to Clement's old home.

"Now do tell us," began Alice, with a frankness which rather horrified Launcelot. "what is Mrs. Clem like?"

"My dear Miss Dale, I never described anyone in my life. I couldn't do it."

"But you have seen her?"

"I have hardly spoken to her. Mr. Dale," here he glanced at Lady Alleyne, guessing the news would be welcome, at least, to her, "seems in the best of health and spirits!"

"You are really too provoking. Do tell us plainly what you think of her?"

"That she has a very devoted husband."

"Mr. Forde!"

"Well," and Launcelot smiled at his success in parrying their questions, "what do you want to know, Miss Dale? I was doing my best, but I warned you I was not good at descriptions."

"Is she a lady?"

"That is such a vague word," replied Mr. Forde, deliberately. "You see, nowadays everyone is a lady."

"But in our sense of the word!"

"I don't think I have a particular sense of it. I wiped the word out of my vocabulary ever since I was in Maryland, where my laundress was always called the wash-lady!"

"But you are telling us nothing. Would she pass muster in a crowd? Is she very dreadful?"

"I think she would be remarked, even in a crowd," said Launcelot, quietly. "And now, please, let us drop the subject of Mrs. Dale, and go on with our tennis."

Jasmin herself met him as he cantered up the avenue of Ashridge on his return. He dismounted at once, and walked back to the house with her.

"I have obeyed you!" he said, smiling, "but I feel like an arch plotter. I said nothing but the truth, and yet I have left the family at The Sycamores more firmly convinced than ever of your lowly origin."

Clem was not a jealous man, but he did notice that his wife's manner to Mr. Forde was rather more cordial than was usual to a man only just introduced to her.

He caught Launcelot watching Jasmin as she sat at work with Gladys, and an uncomfortable sort of feeling seized him that Lord Conroy's nephew admired his wife. But for a little private talk with Jasmin the third night of their visit the tiny cloud of suspicion might have led to a real gulf between them.

"Don't you think, dear!" he began, rather awkwardly, "Launcelot Forde is rather rude? He seems to talk to you as familiarly as though he was an old friend!"

No hint of her husband's meaning came to Jasmin. Loving Clem with all her heart and soul, the idea of his being jealous never entered her head.

"I knew him when I was a little child, Clem, and dad liked him so. I should have told you before, only we never seem to be alone now. And I am sure he would not like the Earl and Gladys to know, because, when he lived near us, he and his mother were quite poor—poorer than dad and I. Mrs. Forde was dying, and dad was kind to them. We never knew they had grand relations. When I met Mr. Forde here it seemed like a dream."

"When did you hear of them last?"

"We never heard of them after the month they spent at Whitby. I was only twelve years' old then, and never thought of asking them to write, and dad was too busy. Besides, we both knew there could be but one thing to hear—that Mrs. Forde was dead. I am afraid I am very thoughtless, Clem. When you told me of Lady Gladys, I never even noticed her name was like Mr. Forde's."

Clement was quite satisfied. He drew his wife's face close to him and kissed it.

"I understand, Jasmin, the Fordes are fearfully proud. This man would never come near Ashridge until he had got on in the world, and was independent of all help from his uncle. Of course he would hate it to be known here that you had met him in his needy days!"

"I am sorry he is proud, Clem!"

"Why, little girl?"

"Because I am quite sure he is in love with Lady Gladys, and if he is so proud he will never tell her so!"

"In love with Gladys! Why, dear, he had never seen her till a fortnight ago!"

"How long did it take you to fall in love with me?" demanded Clem's bride.

"But it's so different. Those two are always sparring. They can hardly say a civil word to each other!"

"Because each is afraid the other will find out their secret," retorted Jasmin. "I am certain Mr. Forde is in love with Gladys, and I believe she likes him too!"

Clem was more than satisfied. He told Jasmin that her reasoning was unanswerable, and forthwith the solitary speck of cloud on his married life fled, and he was—in spite of the coolness with his family—happy and content.

It had been decided that the young couple should spend a fortnight with their friends. The paper, in whose interests Clem had visited Africa, offered him a permanent engagement, and he believed his income would be larger than he had expected. He and Jasmin would go into lodgings for a few weeks, while they chose and furnished the little house which was to be their first home.

"I wish my parents could see her, Gladys," said Clem, as he and Lady Gladys stood watching Jasmin feeding the peacock, who strutted about the grounds at Ashridge in all his glory. "She is so fair and sweet they must take her to their hearts in time. And when I ask from them nothing in the world but their goodwill, it seems hard that should be denied."

"It will come right!" said Gladys, brightly. "As you say, when they see Jasmin they must relent, and a meeting is sure to come about before long. You know papa and I hope for visits from you whenever you can leave London."

It was the day before the Dales were to say good-bye to their kind friends, and Lady Gladys had planned a farewell expedition to some celebrated ruins in the neighbourhood, which Jasmin had never seen.

The Rector, his wife and daughters, Dr. Hastings and the curate joined the party, which in all numbered about a dozen.

Lord Conroy had backed out of it, declaring he was too old for picnics, and that he much preferred his dinner on a comfortable table to having it spread on damp grass. But the others made light of such drawbacks; and they all started in the best of spirits—Clement driving Lady Gladys in the dog-cart, Jasmin in the large open carriage, under the motherly wing of the Rector's wife.

It was a five miles' drive through some of the loveliest scenery Jasmin had ever seen. She was delighted with the excursion; and Mrs. Drake, who was almost as good as a living guide book, began to tell her of the ruin and its history.

"The strangest thing about the place is the haunted gallery," she began, cheerfully. "If two people go there alone, and either of them is keeping a secret from the other, they are bound to reveal it!"

"But why?" demanded Jasmin, who had reasons of her own for objecting to such a strange phenomenon.

"I can't tell you, my dear. But it is true, isn't it, Charles?" appealing to the Rector.

"In a way. But, Mrs. Dale, the truth is, the approach to the gallery is so intricate and lonely that to reach the magic spot requires a great deal of courage and determination. I do not suppose any two people ever achieved the journey (many have begun it and turned back) who were not young and romantic, and in some strange way attracted to each other. With the nerves overstrained, and the feelings excited, they may have been sensible of an emotional force others would never perceive."

"Just listen to him, Mrs. Dale!" said his wife, smiling. "You would think he was addressing a lecture to us on the folly of believing in ghosts. I hope you and your husband will visit the haunted gallery, and bring back a full and particular account of all that befalls you there."

But Jasmin mentally decided she would do nothing of the kind. When lunch had been discussed, and the charms of the wood and ruins exhausted, Gladys Forde introduced the subject of the haunted gallery.

"You ought to go and see it, Jasmin," she said, smiling, "for it is one of the lions of our county; and Clem knows every step of the way, so that you would have no difficulty."

"I have not been there since I was a boy," said Clem. "And the moment the noise began—the ghost's invocation, as people call it—I was so upset that I at once confessed to you, Gladys, it was I who had drowned your best doll only the day before. I don't think you would ever have known her fate but for that wonderful expedition of ours."

Jasmin shivered.

"I would rather not go there," she said, anxiously. "Please don't laugh at me, but I know I should feel frightened."

"Are you braver than Mrs. Dale?" demanded Launcelot of his cousin. "Will you come with me, Gladys, and risk the terrible secrets I may reveal to you?"

Gladys seemed about to refuse, but she was over-persuaded by the rest of the party; and finally the two cousins plunged into the thick wood which was supposed to lead to the haunted gallery.

"I don't see how this can be the way," objected Launcelot. "Dr. Hastings pointed out the walls of the gallery to me when we were on the tower."

"But as it happens the lake washes round the gallery on every side but one. This place is really a sort of maze. The spot itself is quite close, and yet we have to walk a couple of miles to reach it."

"And Mrs. Dale was frightened at the bare idea. You are stronger-minded."

"I have no secret," replied Gladys, bravely, "and I have always laughed at the superstition, though it is generally believed."

"Do people often go up?"

"Very seldom; the more rustic merry-makers get frightened at the long, difficult way, and among ourselves a kind of weird fear of the consequences has sprung up."

"This place belongs to your father, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"And the legend concerns our ancestors?"

"Yes; a great grandmother of ours—I really am afraid to say how many 'greats' I ought to have used—was a kind of Spartan matron, and endeavoured to make all her children speak the truth. She had this gallery made because there was an echo there, so that she could hear what was said in it. On the evidence of the echo she detected one of her sons in a falsehood. It was something tremendously bad. I fancy he was making love to a village girl while his mother and betrothed were walking below, and heard the echo of his wooing."

"Pleasant for them!"

"He was her favourite son. She cast him out penniless; but she died of a broken heart, first laying a sort of curse upon the spot that had proved so fatal to her hopes. Whoever walked there henceforward—the legend runs—should be forced to reveal the very secret of their heart."

"Then Mrs. Drake got a wrong version. She

said when any two people walked there their secrets should be revealed!"

"Surely, Launcelot, you don't imagine anyone would be rash enough to go alone? I assure you in this part of the world people are too superstitious to tempt their fate. Few are brave enough to venture in couples; but I don't suppose since the time of Lady Eleanore herself anyone has gone alone."

"And the noise they hear—the ghosts' incantation—what of that?"

"Papa says it is the water of the lake against the rugged walls. I have fancied it was the wind coming through the broken windows. I suppose anyone could fancy it a voice, if they tried, but I am not emotional."

"Nor am I!"

"I think myself practical common-sense people get on much better than those foolish creatures given to romance and sentiment! Don't you agree with me?" inquired Gladys.

He hesitated.

"Has it ever occurred to you that of all the world you and I ought to have most sympathy with romance!"

"No!" replied Gladys, coldly. "What do you mean?"

It was the first time he had ever touched on the cause of the old quarrel between their fathers. His voice was grave, almost solemn, as he answered,—

"Because I am the son of parents who gave up home, fortune, and ambition for dear love's sake, while your mother's love endured even through the years in which she saw Lord Conroy's heart well-nigh broken for another's loss."

A dead silence. He hardly knew whether he had offended her or not, and at last they found themselves at the foot of a rugged stone which led straight to the gallery. The dust and dirt of years seemed to have accumulated there.

Launcelot paused, and looked at his cousin's fresh linen dress, and dainty cloth jacket.

"Had we not better turn back? You will be choked by dust, to say nothing of the dirt!"

"We will turn back—if you are afraid!"

"I don't think I deserved that taunt, Gladys. If you leave the decision to me of course we go on!"

They came out upon a long stone walk—on one side a rugged wall, on the other nothing at all.

The gallery had once run round every side of the square castleyard—now only bordered two. The wall protected the rough promenade on the side of the lake, but anyone who had ventured too near the edge on the other side, and turned giddy, must have fallen over and been dashed in pieces.

"We will sit down," said Gladys, pointing to a rough bench hewn in the stone. "I feel almost giddy, those stairs wound round so. There, look at the view, and tell me if it is not worth the climb?"

"It is quite worth it!" but he looked at Gladys, not at the view.

Suddenly, before either of them could speak, there arose near them a low, wailing sound. A practical person might have given to it either of the explanations Gladys had volunteered so fluently during their ascent, but, none the less, it bore a strong resemblance to a human voice—a woman's voice, perhaps, in sore distress.

"Oh, let us go down!" cried Gladys.

She rose, but the next moment her head began to swim, and if Launcelot had not caught her in his arms, and forcibly held her on to the seat, she must have fallen headlong down those dreadful stairs.

"You are tired and dizzy!" he said, kindly. "When you are rested we will go down. Believe me, Gladys, it is not safe for you to try to walk yet."

"But I can't stay here," cried Gladys. "That voice is terrible. I feel as though some one near me were crying."

"You are tired and overstrung!" said Launcelot, gravely. "I don't think, Gladys, you have looked at all well these last few days. Do you find entertaining a bride a very exhausting task?"

I am very fond of Jasmin. You know they leave to-morrow?"

"Yes!"

"I don't like saying 'good-bye'!"

"Neither do I, and yet I shall have to say it to my uncle and yourself next week!"

"Surely you are not going already?"

"I have been here nearly a month, and——"

She finished his sentence for him.

"And you are tired of us?"

"And I think it is time I began to seek a fresh appointment. You know I am a soldier of fortune, Gladys. My dear old friend Sir Joshua thinks he can find me a post in Fiji."

"What a hateful place!"

"Is it. I really know nothing about it."

"I think it is absurd!" said Gladys, crossly. "You know perfectly well you will be Lord Conroy—some day; and why need an Earl go rushing off to unheard-of savage places!"

"But, my dear Gladys, I hope not to be Lord Conroy for a great many years, and Fiji is not savage."

"Papa will be so disappointed."

"I don't think Lord Conroy will misunderstand me. He knows that in diplomacy one has to work constantly, or be forgotten."

"But when you are—Lord Conroy?"

"Well, I shall work still, and probably find the title a great drawback. People won't easily believe an Earl is only a penniless lad with a long pedigree."

"Oh, dear!" said Gladys, bitterly, "you make me wish I had never been born. You are so disagreeable!"

"My dear child, failing your birth I should probably be the same. I don't see how your not having been born would make me more agreeable!"

"It would make you—rich!"

"And it so happens I never coveted wealth. I don't grudge you an iota of your fortune!"

"I hate the very sound of it; but, one thing, you will have to take it all some day. When papa and I are dead, you won't be able to refuse!"

"I don't think you, either of you, show signs of speedy dissolution, and believe me, Gladys, I am glad of it."

"You are odious!"

He smiled.

"The spell is working, Gladys. You are telling me your secret—your bad opinion of me. I really have a great mind to tell you mine!"

"What is it?"

"I wish you would."

"It is a great secret—you must not tell a human creature!"

"Very well."

"And you must forget it yourself!"

"What is it?"

"The true reason why I must leave you next Monday, and never again return to Ashridge?"

"Why, you told me that before. You said it was because you belonged to the diplomatic profession."

"It was nothing to do with diplomacy."

"What then?"

"Love!"

"Love! I thought you did not believe in it?" she said, quickly.

"I never said so."

"But——"

"I told you it was a secret. I said you must forget it. It is only that I, a penniless soldier of fortune, have been mad enough to love you—the heiress of Ashridge!"

A long, long silence.

"Don't cry!" gently, for the sound of her sobs hurt him. "Gladys, don't cry. It is not your fault. You will forget my folly and marry a man worthy of you."

"I shall never marry at all!" cried Gladys, passionately, "never while I live; and when I am gone you will be master of Ashridge!"

"Foolish child!"

"Shall I tell you why?"

"Yes."

"You told me your secret, now listen to mine. I shall never marry because my love is given to one who scorns it!"

"Gladys!"

For an instant he looked into her eyes, then he caught her in his arms and pressed her to his heart, and so they understood each other at last. Love had conquered pride, and the son of Lord Conroy's first choice was betrothed to his daughter.

CHAPTER V., AND LAST.

Of course the engagement was announced, and equally of course it largely confirmed the superstitious faith in the old legend of the haunted gallery.

Lord Conroy was delighted. Clement and Jasmin rejoiced in their friends' happiness. Tenants and servants were pleased that the old lands and the title were likely to descend together, and perhaps the only people who objected to the betrothal of Gladys and Launcelot were the young ladies at The Sycamores.

Aunt Janey was so disgusted at what she called the "young man's perfidy," that she took to her bed.

The girls, with one voice, refused to go and congratulate their quondam friend; so Lady Alleyne drove over to Ashridge alone, thinking, with a sigh, that only two days earlier she would have met Clement and his bride.

"She is delightful!" said Gladys, speaking in warm praise of Jasmin. "And Clement looks so happy! Dear Lady Alleyne, I think the first marriage in your family will be a great success, and I feel sure when you meet Jasmin you will love her dearly."

Alas! that autumn was not a prosperous time at The Sycamores. Aunt Janey took cold early in October, and, to the surprise of everyone who knew her, died within a week.

The old maid was far weaker than those who writhed under her sharp tongue imagined. Her death revealed the terrible fact that the money her nieces had expected so confidently had been sunk in an annuity. Of the last half-year's payment there remained just sufficient to pay her funeral expenses.

Lord and Lady Alleyne consulted together in alarm. Their sister had paid a liberal sum towards housekeeping expenses. How to get on without it they could not tell!

"David must work," said the father, resolutely.

But David point-blank refused; and seeing there was no help to be had in that quarter Lord Alleyne consulted his old friend, the Earl of Conroy, as to whether he should try to let The Sycamores, and take his family abroad to economise.

"Kitty is to marry Hastings," he said, sadly. "The girl's heart was set on it, and after Clem's *mésalliance* I could not be too particular."

"I think Hastings a most desirable son-in-law," said the Earl, "and I never could understand why you stood out so long against it. Now, regarding Clem's bride, did you ever hear anything definitely of her parentage?"

"There was nothing good to hear."

"Well, it so happens that my nephew Launcelot knew her father intimately, and says he was one of the most accomplished scholars and truest gentlemen he ever met."

"I never heard even his name!"

"So I should imagine. Well, he was Sir Geoffrey Lyle of Monkton Priory, near Whitby, and Jasmin is his only child and heiress — a richer heiress, let me tell you, Alleyne, than my girl Gladys!"

"Clem ought to have told me."

"Clem never knew it until he went to London last month and saw his wife's trustees. Sir Geoffrey travelled as 'Mr. Lyle.' When he found Clement believed his daughter penniless he let him continue in the mistake, charmed

by the certainty his child was loved, as he had always wished, for herself alone."

"You might have given me a hint."

"I knew nothing till they had left us. Mr. and Mrs. Dale are staying at the Langham Hotel until they go down to spend Christmas at the Priory. They have a clear fifty thousand a-year, and one of the loveliest homes in the north!"

"And I have a bare fifteen hundred—after the interest on the mortgages is paid."

"Why don't you make it up with Clem? He could pay off those mortgages out of the funded property, and give you peace for the rest of your life!"

"But I wrote and accused him of marrying a Kaffir!"

"Well, when people are very happy, they find it easy to forgive. I advise you to run up to London, and call at the Langham Hotel."

* * * * *

The advice was taken, and with such good results that the Honourable Mr. and Mrs. Dale spent a week at The Sycamores in December, in order to attend the wedding of Dr. Hastings and Kathleen. The mortgages were paid off to the last farthing, and Lord Alleyne once more held up his head.

But, gentle and forgiving as was Jasmin, she never learned to love her husband's kindred as she loved Lady Gladys Forde, Launcelot's happy wife, the girl who had welcomed her so kindly when she first came to her husband's native place as a stranger, and every voice was raised to pronounce judgment on CLEMENT'S BRIDE!

[THE END.]

A STRANGE MISTAKE.

—o—

FREDERIC WYLDE was pacing the floor of his library in no pleasant frame of mind.

"Vera!" he spoke, sharply.

"Well, father?"

And a beautiful girl of nineteen, with golden hair, pearly teeth and ruby lips, turned her blue eyes full upon him.

"I shall withdraw my consent."

Vera sat down, pale and panting.

"You have decided then, father?"

"I have decided."

There was a long, deep sigh, and then a burst of tears.

"I shall never be happy again, father!" she sobbed forth.

"Oh, yes, you will, my dear; for you will find some one worthy of you, which this man, Lionel Ramsden, is not. One thing is certain—you would never be happy with him. No woman can be happy with a gambler for a husband, no matter how kind and amiable he may be, because his evil pursuits will occupy his thoughts, and the turn of a single card may send him from affluence to poverty. I will trust neither my daughter nor my fortune in such hands."

"But, father, I tell you there is some mistake. Lionel Ramsden is not a gambler."

"The mistake is with you, then, my dear child, for I tell you he is a gambler."

"Richard Burt told you so?"

"I first heard it from him—yes."

"He had no motive, of course?"

"I allowed for that, and took pains to be sure."

"And are you sure, father?"

"Yes, daughter."

"Who else asserts it?"

"I do!"

"From his statement?"

"From my own sight."

"You have seen it?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Last night."

"Where?"

"At the gambling club next door to Barton's Hotel."

"You saw Lionel Ramsden there last night in that gambling den?"

"I did."

"Father, don't think I mean to doubt your belief in your own assertion when I declare you mistaken. Lionel could not have been there, because I this morning received a telegram from him, sent from a long way off. Here it is, with day and hour plainly marked on it."

The father took it, and examined it closely, turned it over a few times, looked through it to the light, and then rejoined,—

"This appears to be all right, Vera, but appearances are often deceptive. How it was managed I don't know, unless the fellow has a friend or confederate out there; but this I do know—that Lionel Ramsden himself was not there when this was sent, because I saw him here, in this city, as clearly as I see you now!"

"Father, you amaze and bewilder me! I don't for a moment doubt your belief, and yet I cannot feel that you are right."

"If you don't believe my eyes, Vera, would you believe your own?"

"What do you mean?"

"If I place you where you can see Lionel Ramsden, spending hour after hour, staking his money at the gaming table, will you believe what you see?"

"I should have to, father, though it were to break my heart."

"Shall I arrange matters, then, for you to see?"

For some time Vera sat and shivered, and then gasped out,—

"Will he or anyone else be aware of my espionage?"

"No; I can arrrange it with certain parties, who, for detective purposes, control the spy-room, which looks into the room, where many a suspected party has been watched before now."

"Then, father," responded Vera, in a voice which trembled with emotion, "I will venture to see for myself, and if I find your assertions true——"

She paused, covered her eyes with her hands, and shivered as if with an ague.

"I am deeply sorry for you, my dear child," he said, with much feeling, "and would at least give half I am worth to have matters otherwise; but I feel it is better for you to get the painful truth now than to have it come to you when bound to the guilty party by the most sacred of earthly bonds. Am I not right, darling?"

"Yes, father!" with a gasp.

"Then I will arrange matters for to-morrow night."

"And to see him, whom you think I shall see, will be to prove him a base deceiver of one he has claimed to love above all earthly things."

"It will be even so, my poor child; but you must call pride to your aid, and look with angry scorn upon his wicked deed."

"It will at least end all between us," she said, with a sigh that was almost a groan.

The following night, well muffled up, that no one might accidentally recognise her, Vera Wylde—pale, nervous, and sick at heart—accompanied her father to the dimly-lighted spy-room he had mentioned, and looked through a prepared aperture into a brilliantly-lighted apartment, where many an otherwise good man had been lured to ruin, and more than one to that awful self-murder which is the destruction of both body and soul.

And what did she see that caused her to start and cling to her father for support?

There before her, clearly enough to leave no hope of mistake, sat the idol of her heart, the ideal of her dreams, the one being she had chosen from out the whole world of mankind to be her partner for life, to love, honour and cling to, come weal or come woe, and whose loss she felt must leave her unhappy for evermore.

Yes, there before her he sat, with pale face and corrugated brows, placing his money on the fatal cards, and watching every motion and turn as if life and death were involved in each.

And so they were—life and death were so involved—and so it chanced that the awful time had come for death to triumph.

"Oh, Lionel, lost to me for ever!" came from the soul of the wretched girl — came from her soul, but not her lips; they were now ashy-hued, compressed and silent, though the soul was sending forth its appealing agony. "Oh, Lionel, that you should so deceive one who had so loved and trusted you! Farewell—farewell for ever!"

Then it was, as if he had heard these parting words, he ceased to play, and watched the cards with glaring eyes till he saw his last stake raked into the swelling pile of the bank.

For a minute or two longer he sat and stared, as one without hope looking into vacancy.

Then he rose up, with a marble-like face, and slowly took in the whole scene, with what seemed to be a stony gaze that had no speculation in it.

Vera watched him, holding her breath, and with a fearful presentiment of something terrible to come; while her father, with a heavy frown, kept him under his piercing and angry eye.

"Now you believe, Vera?" he whispered.

"Hush!" she gasped, feeling that something dreadful was about to happen.

The young man's stony gaze went all around the grand apartment, as if taking his final leave of everything, and then for an instant seemed to rest upon the hidden aperture behind which Vera was trembling, as if he knew that all the most prized on earth was there.

Then up came a hand to his right temple, and gasping Vera caught the glitter of steel.

"Gentlemen," said a hollow voice, that seemed to come from the depths of woe, "I have played all, lost all, and here ends all!"

With the words there came a sharp report, and the faded young man sunk down, a ghastly corpse, on the spot where he had stood, in the midst of the startled players, who started up in wild confusion and alarm, some hastening to the suicide, but most of them rushing from the tragic scene in terror.

Wylde threw his arms around his daughter, exclaiming,—

"This is terrible, Vera! Come away, my darling—come away!"

But he received no answer, and found her heavy in his arms.

She had swooned.

It was two hours after that before the almost heart-broken girl had sufficiently recovered to be driven to her own home.

When they reached their mansion, at a late hour, all the domestics had retired for the night, except the one waiting up for them, and he had fallen asleep.

There was one person to open to their ring, however; and as he did so he said, with a light laugh,—

"Excuse me for staying here and playing porter; but I felt I must see you before going home, and John has fallen asleep, and——"

He was interrupted by a wild, piercing shriek, and Vera Wylde, falling forward, was caught in his arms.

"Great Heavens! what is this?" cried her father, all aghast, and staggering back, with both hands uplifted.

"I do not know," answered the young man, in nervous alarm, thinking the question referred to the swooning of Vera. "She seems as if overcome with fright. Surely I——"

By that time the father's hands had seized hold of him, and in a hoarse voice, and eyes glaring into his, he interrupted him with the words, fiercely spoken,—

"Who are you and what are you? Living or dead, mortal or spirit?"

"Why, Mr. Wylde, are you mad?"

"Perhaps so—I don't know. Speak you,

and tell me if you are flesh and blood, and by what trick you have done this?"

"Sir, I don't understand you!"

"Who are you?"

"Don't you know me?"

"Pronounce your name!"

"Lionel Ramsden."

"Then it was a trick!"

"What was?"

"Your suicide!"

"My suicide?"

"Yes."

"I don't understand you."

"Did you not pretend to shoot yourself to-night at Marbury's?"

"Neither to-night nor any other night, for I was never in Marbury's in my life, and I don't know what you mean."

"Thank Heaven, then, if there is a mistake here!" said Frederic Wylde, as he assisted the half-bewildered lover, the real Lionel, to carry his daughter into the parlour and revive her.

Further conversation soon developed the fact that there had been a fearful mistake in supposing the gambler and suicide to be Lionel Ramsden, though a natural mistake in this case, because each of the two men was almost the exact image of the other.

Lionel had been away on a journey, and could prove it. The telegram received by Vera had really been sent by him, and he had now called, on his return, on his affianced, before going to his own home.

So the bright sunshine of joy quickly dispelled the dark vapours of gloom, and happiness now has its abode in two loving hearts.

FACETIÆ.

"So your wife has left you?" "She has." "What were her last words on leaving you" "Is my hat on straight?"

Fogg suggests that a wife is called a helpmate because of the help she gives her daughters to mate.

"I'll just take off my ova coat," is what the young chick said as it broke the shell and first saw the light of day.

"It's cold this morning," remarked the visitor, as he entered the sanctum. "Yes," replied the editor; "I knew that from the fact that you left the door open."

"Why do they say a sandy moustache?" asked Miss Gullible, musingly. "Because," said her erudite brother, "Sandy is short for Alexander, and he had one of that colour."

When men are as good as their obituaries, and women are as good as the men think they are, the recording angel in Heaven can take his long-needed vacation.

Nerdy Client: "If I lose my case I don't see how you are to be paid." Lawyer: "Oh, don't worry about that, my dear sir. The lawyer on the other side is my partner."

"You tell me you congratulated the bride, Brooks? That was not the proper form. You should have wished her joy." "The groom is an old man, very consumptive and very wealthy. I knew what I was doing, Rivers."

"A lover is a torment, and a nuisance to boot," said the pretty girl, saucily tossing her head, and the young man who was listening to her sighed and said: "So your father seems to think."

Old Cut: "Remember, my son, there is lots of room at the top, but you'll have to struggle." Young Cut: "Guess I'll linger quietly at the bottom, where there is plenty of room and no struggle."

Hicks (closing the book): "Ah, well, it's never too late to mend!" Mrs. Hicks (snappishly): "No, not when you've got as many children as I have!"

He (discussing electrocution): "I think decapitation is the worst death. I don't believe I could meet it calmly." She: "No; you would probably lose your head."

A plain man in a prayer-meeting of a church said, "Brethren, we all want the Lord's way to prevail, but we all want to be on the committee of ways and means."

Cora: "I would wait ever so long for any man that could love me for myself alone." Violet: "What patience! And you have already waited so many years.

"Do you mean to challenge the jury?" whispered a lawyer to his Irish client. "Yis, be jabbers! If they don't acquit me I mane to challenge ivery spalpeen of them. I want ye to give 'em all a hint of it, too."

Maiden: "It seems to me society is useful only to people who want to get married." Matron: "You mistake, my dear. It is equally useful to people who are married and want to forget it."

Some vastly amusing advertisements are to be found in theatrical papers. Here is one, for instance: "Mr. X. disengaged for small parts, as dead bodies, mobs, processions, outside shouts, &c."

Mrs. De Sour (angrily): "I want you to keep your dog out of my house, Mrs. De Smart. It's full of fleas." Mrs. De Smart: "Mercy on me! Fido! Come here, sir! Don't you go into that house again. It's full of fleas."

Ethel: "I saw your intended to-day." Maud: "Whom do you refer to?" Ethel: "Why, Jack Brown, of course." Maud: "Oh dear no. He is not my intended. He is only my engaged."

Uncle: "And now good-bye, my dear nephew, and if you should need any money, why, write to me." Nephew (pulling a letter out of his pocket): "Certainly I will, uncle. There's the first letter now."

Proud Father (showing off his boy before company): "My son, which would you rather be—Shakespeare or Edison?" Little Son (after meditation): "I'd rather be Edison." "Why?" "'Cause he ain't dead."

At the Navy Yard.—"We cast cannon in here," said the guide, as they stepped inside. "Do you?" asked the pretty girl. "Now, please show us where you blow great guns. I often hear my naval friends speak of them."

"Now, my dear, you must do as the Romans do," said old man S—— to his wife on their arrival in Italy. And the first thing the old lady saw was a boy trying to stand on his head in the corner of a railway station.

Tanning being now done by electricity, mischievous small boys should take notice that a cheap and efficient dynamo is being prepared to which a slipper or other implement can be attached for spanking purposes.

"Father, do people buy snuff?" "Yes, my child; why do you ask?" "Well, then, why do people say they take it?" Father (aside): "Thank Heaven, there is likely to be one genius in my family."

A man who sits all day with one side of his face turned to a window, claims that the sunlight makes one side of his moustache grow twice as fast as the side turned from the window.

An Equivocal Reply.—Ernestine: "When I get old and haggard and uninteresting, Horace, will you love me then as now?" Horace (glancing at his new mother-in-law): "Well, er—sweetheart, I shall certainly have have an almighty lot of respect for you."

"And you were at Venice?" exclaimed Mrs. Hojack, to her caller. "How interesting! Of course you saw the Lions of St. Mark's?" "Well, no," replied Mrs. Trotter. "The fact is, we didn't go to the zoological gardens at all."

Lord Lineage: "These are portraits of my ancestors." Mr. Gotham: "You don't say so! Who is that young-looking chap there?" "That's my great-grandfather." "And who is the old fellow with the grey beard?" "That's my grandfather." "Seems to me your great-grandfather looks mighty young to have such an old-looking son as your grandfather."

Awestruck Visitor: "It must be very difficult to produce such an exquisite work of art." Von Dauber: "Nonsense! Almost anybody can paint a picture; but finding a sucker to buy it after it is painted is where the art comes in."

Carlos had just received a telegram from Havana. "What an admirable invention the telegraph is!" he exclaimed, "when you consider that this message has come a distance of 1,500 leagues, and the gum on the envelope isn't dry yet!"

"How times are changed!" said Dr. Sarcasticon, as he paused in his discourse on the evolution of man. "In the Old Testament, it was a miracle for an ass to speak, and now nothing short of a miracle would keep one quiet!"

Old Gentleman: "I have but one daughter, sir, and I can't afford to let you take her from under my roof." Young Man: "Exactly, sir; and I can't afford to take her from under it. What I want is to live under your roof with her."

At the club in the moralists' corner: "I don't know anything so intolerable as that fellow who is always laughing at our serious remarks." "Pardon, there is something worse—the other fellow who never will laugh at our jokes."

Pretty Girl: "Did you see the way that man looked at me? It was positively insulting." Big Brother: "Did he stare?" Pretty Girl: "Stare? Why, no. He ran his eyes over me and then glanced off at some one else, just as if I wasn't worth a second thought."

"My dear sir, you have travelled in Africa. Do the African ladies suffer as much as we from the tyranny of man?" "Oh no; the ladies have special privileges—" "How I long to be there!" "As I was going to say, at all the banquets the lady captives are always first eaten."

Mr. De Quincy (trying to get out one of his consumptive jokelets): "I wonder why a man's pockets are always made so that a woman can find them; while a woman's pockets a man can never find?" Mrs. De Q. (snorting): "A man has no business to be trying to find a woman's pocket."

"What's that awful noise in the next room?" asked the early guest at the banquet. "That," replied the newspaper reporter, who had already arrived with a sharp pencil and a shaper appetite, "must be the table groaning under all the delicacies of the season."

"I see that they are telling fortunes by the foot instead of the hand," said Timley. "It is an excellent method," said Tumbel. "I read my own fortune in that way once." "How so?" "I was about to ask for Miss Richley's hand that I might know it, when her father's foot revealed it to me."

His Compliment.—Miss De Pretty: "I don't see how you whistle through your fingers that way. I could never do it in the world." Mr. Goodheart (wishing to compliment her delicate little hands): "No, Miss De Pretty, if you should try it your whole hand would slip into your mouth."

"Have you any large-sized gentleman's gloves?" he asked. "How large-sized a gentleman?" inquired the salesman, with a smile of frosty Bostonian severity. "Large enough, I think, sir," replied the customer, moving away, "to walk without any help to some other shop where the clerks are not classical."

"Don't you like it, darling?" he inquires anxiously, as she critically examines the costly solitaire, with a grave face and slightly corrugated brow. "Oh, yes, it is a beautiful ring," she answers, in dollar-an-icicle-and-short-ones-at-that tone; but these are not my initials, Mr. Bynthyre; they are my cousin Clara's." "Oh, by Jove! that's the second time this year I've forgotten to have those confounded initials planed down," he answers in a disgusted tone, and further explaination availeth him not.

SOCIETY.

THE Sultan is said to be studying German with great zeal.

STEEL hoops are now provided for the tops of the high-shouldered sleeves.

THE Duke of Clarence and Avondale is at York with his regiment.

PRINCE GEORGE OF WALES is expected home in May, and it is probable that the Queen will confer a dukedom upon him.

THE Duchess of Albany during her stay at Cannes inhabits the very house—the Villa Nevada—in which her husband died just seven years ago.

THERE is to be no room for the hair dyes from this time on until further notice, it being decreed that grey shall be the most fashionable tint for woman's finest ornament.

THE Grand Hotel, which has been taken for the Queen's accommodation during her visit to Grasse, is a big, and rather an uninteresting looking building. It has, however, a fine situation on a hill, and commands remarkably fine views.

MISS DAVENPORT, the Irish governess of the juvenile King of Spain, gets about £800, a-year salary, and will soon be entitled to a life pension of about £500 a-year.

BOTH the Queen and Princess Beatrice are going to give Princess Louise of Schleswig-Holstein some lovely old lace from their exquisite collections. Her Royal Highness's wedding dress will be richly trimmed with some specimens of great beauty and value.

THE Princess of Wales has given orders that nothing need be submitted for her inspection or that of her daughters, in which birds are used as trimming. It is to be hoped that all ladies will follow her example. The war on birds is a disgrace to civilisation.

AMIDST all the daily anxieties and terrors of her life, it is interesting to know that the Empress of Russia retains her taste for dancing, which was such a source of delight to her as a girl that her sisters christened her "La Cigale." There is something a little pathetic in the fact that the favourite amusement of her girlhood should prove her principal relief in her anxious womanhood.

BUTTONS are to be revived for ornament as well as for use. Antique buttons are being manufactured in great variety. Miniatures of the beauties of different reigns set round with pearls, enamels studded with paste, old silver and gold incrusted with jewels, are all to be in favour. The smartest will be of Wedgwood china. The ground is to be the colour of the dress or coat, and the figure or tracery upon each button is white or cream.

THE Emperor of China sleeps on a bed of carved wood magnificently inlaid with gold and ivory. It is said, concerning the Chinese Court, that the strictest observance of etiquette extends even to the parents of the monarch, who on visiting their son dare not omit to bend the knee, whilst the younger brother of his Celestial Majesty is subject to observances no less rigid.

THE awkwardness of multiplying certain Christian names is curiously instanced in the case of the name Louise as used by our own Royal Family and its connections. Not only have we Princess Louise, Marchioness of Lorne, Princess Louise, Duchess of Fife, and Princess Louise Christiana of Schleswig-Holstein, but in the summer of 1889 another Princess Louise of Schleswig-Holstein was married to Prince Frederick Leopold of Prussia, and now comes news of the betrothal of yet another Princess Louise of Schleswig-Holstein, daughter of the late Duke Frederick, to the Prince of Waldeck-Pyrmont, father of the Duchess of Albany. The Princess is quite young, and her *fiancé* is sixty.

STATISTICS.

A RAPID penman can write thirty words in a minute.

DOCTORS say the human brain contains 300,000,000 nerve-cells.

IT is estimated that there are 195,000 women employed as dressmakers in Paris.

A GRAIN of fine sand would cover 100 of the minute scales of the human skin, and yet each of these scales in turn covers from 300 to 500 pores.

THE amount of heat which the sun sends forth every second is calculated to be so great that it would require twelve quadrillions of tons of coal to produce it—an amount quite beyond the power of the common mind to grasp. The amount of water which it raises from the earth every minute is estimated at the enormous weight of 37,000,000,000 of tons.

GEMS.

CHERISH your best hopes as faith, and abide by them in action.

A CURSE is like a stone thrown up to Heaven, and most likely to return on the head of him that sent it.

FATHER MATHEW'S immortal pledge was, "For my own sake, for the sake of others, and for the glory of God, I abstain."

WE are ridiculous enough in setting up for patterns of perfection ourselves, without becoming answerable for that of others. It is best to confine our absurdities at home.

WISDOM does not consist in the ability to heap up facts, although our school instructors seem to think it does. Wisdom is concerned with something far higher than facts; it is concerned with the true, the eternal, the unchanging relations of things.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

GINGER APPLES.—Boil in one and one-half pints of water one-half ounce nicely cleaned ginger root, then add two pounds of sugar, and let it boil five minutes more. Add two pounds of apples, pared, cored and quartered. Cook until clear, skim out, boil down the syrup and pour it over.

SCALLOPED CHICKEN.—Mince cold chicken and ham fine, and season with pepper and a little salt. Add enough sweet milk to make it moist. Add a little melted butter—about a tablespoonful. Mince one slice of a small onion very fine, and add this and a couple of pinches of sifted, dried thyme. Mix all well, fill scallop shells with the chicken, cover with bread crumbs and a bit of butter on each, and brown before the fire or in front of a range.

POTATO PUDDING.—Half-pound mashed potatoes, two ounces butter, one egg, one small teacup milk, pinch of salt, two ounces sugar, juice and rind of half a lemon. Have the potatoes nicely boiled and dry; mash them, and add the butter, then the salt and sugar, then the lemon rind grated and the juice. Beat up the egg and pour the milk among it, stir it in among the other things, pour it in a pudding dish, and put it in the oven for about half-an-hour.

MACARONI PUDDING.—Two ounces macaroni, two breakfast cups milk, one egg, a little nutmeg, one tablespoonful sugar. Break the macaroni and put it into boiling water, with a little salt, to boil for five minutes. Then drain it, and put the milk in, and let it boil gently for fifteen or twenty minutes, till it is quite tender. Take the pan from the fire, add the sugar and flavouring, then the egg well beaten. Pour it all into a pie-dish, and bake about half-an-hour.

MISCELLANEOUS.

SPIDERS are seven times stronger in proportion than lions.

ONE-THIRD of the Paris streets are planted with trees.

THERE are six insane females to five insane males.

THERE were eight hundred and thirty-six cremations in the capital of Japan during the month of November.

A MAN with good sight ought to be able to read this print at a distance of eighteen inches.

STRIPED stuffs, woven so that the stripes form a point in the middle of each breadth, are new this winter, and will be a feature of the spring woollens.

THERE is a decided revival of interest in Japanese literature and linguistics in Japan, and the Japanese language is being studied as never before by native speakers of it, who make use of Western methods.

A BEGGAR'S journal has been started in Paris, and meets with success. The cost of a number is two cents, and it contains articles on the best methods of pursuing the business, and advertisements of use to those soliciting charity.

AN Englishman has invented what he claims is a practical application of the idea of stilts with wheels. They are fastened to the feet, as stilts are, and each acts as a sort of independent bicycle. They go very fast when one has learned to walk on them.

STATE sweets are made up into fresh candy. There is not an ounce of waste about confectionery. Chocolate caramels contain more scraps than any other candy. They are especially adapted for this on account of their dark colour. They were first made by a confectioner who received the inspiration from his great stock of stale sweets.

PARIS has a landlord who does not object to children; in fact, the more of them the merrier, he thinks. His apartment house is on the Rue Griset, and only married folks, with children, are received as tenants. When a birth occurs in the house, the mother receives from him ten francs, a fowl, and a supply of coal for the winter.

ONE cause assigned for the healthfulness of Chinese cities is that the people boil all water intended for drinking. They never drink cold water. The national beverage, tea, is always "on tap," even in the houses of the poor. Every little hamlet, too, has a shop where hot water can be bought for a trifling sum at any hour of the day or night.

FROM Bergen, Norway, comes the news of a practical charity contemplating relief to a deserving class, which, however, in our changing domestic conditions, does not make so ready a call upon our sympathies as in older lands. Mrs. S. Soudt has given two houses and fifty thousand kr. to establish a home for aged women servants no longer able to work for their own support.

A CURIOUS state of things prevails at Berwick-on-Tweed. A portion of the burgh is in Scotland, and here the pubs are religiously closed on the Sabbath; in the remaining portion, which is on English soil, they are open during certain hours, and it is curious to note how the population of the town during those hours drifts toward the south, as if by one common instinct.

A STRIKING instance of the effect of trifles oft repeated is seen in a recent statement that a large quantity of the metal on the foot of the famous statue of St. Peter at the Vatican has been worn away by the frequent kisses of votaries. In order to prevent similar injury, the foot of a statue of the Saviour in the Minerva has been protected by a brass buskin, while the face of a bronze statue of the Saviour has been quite kissed away in the course of years.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

Sir Roger.—Merton is in Oxfordshire.

Mab.—Easter Day in 1841 was on April 11.

A Lover of Dogs.—The dog-tax is not levied in Ireland.

Clover.—The *Northfleet* foundered on January 21, 1873.

Moncration.—The figures 1,000,000,000,000 represents one billion.

Spring.—Spring season begins this year March 20, at 9 A.M.

B. A.—The next meeting of the British Association is to take place at Cardiff.

Locksley.—Beauchamp is pronounced "Beecham," and Cholmondeley "Chum-ley."

S. S. T.—The distance from London to Bombay, viâ the Suez Canal, is 5,900 miles.

Interested.—The income-tax was raised to 3*l.* in the pound in 1875, and reduced to 7*d.* in 1887.

Querist.—We know nothing more of Dr. Liebrich's remedy for tuberculosis than has already appeared.

Don Quixote.—Notice to quit may be given by letter. Registration of the letter ensures proof of delivery.

A Clerk.—The Bank of England was incorporated July 27, 1694.

Under Age.—A boy is legally under the control of his parents until he is twenty-one years of age.

Dolly Varden.—Where the engagement is by the week, a week's notice may be given at any time.

Mata.—Twelve inches each way and a half-inch thick would be one square foot, but not one foot square.

Despairing Wife.—A wife's separate property cannot be seized for a husband's debt.

The Antiquary.—Unless the coins are specially brilliant they are only worth their weight in copper.

Bill Stikes.—Conversation is not permitted among prisoners who are undergoing terms of penal servitude.

Middy.—Seventeen is about the age at which midshipmen are received in the Royal Navy.

Ambition.—The salary of the Lord Chancellor is £10,000 per year, and of the Lord Chief Justice £8,000.

M. R. S.—We cannot advise you. The inspector of the sanitary authority is the right person to consult.

A Troubled One.—If the feet are tender and sore bathe them with alcohol each night.

U. S.—There are no religious restrictions of any kind in the United States as to holding public offices.

Fenella.—You will find a table of Easter Days, from the year 1500 to 2000, in Whitaker's Almanack.

Sceptic.—As you say, it looks very well on paper. We advise you to have nothing to do with it.

M. E. R.—Salt sprinkled on any substance that is burning on the stove will stop the smoke and smell.

Heiress.—All Cornish wills are proved at the District Registry at Bodmin.

A Deceived One.—Unless a promise of marriage is renewed after the young man attains his majority, no action for breach of promise by a minor would lie.

A Reader.—We conclude an insurance office would want the one insured to pass the medical examination as to his present soundness and health.

I. O. U.—The Statute of Limitations bars the recovery of a debt which has not been acknowledged for six years.

Nightingale.—1. You cannot sing such a song in public without the consent of the owner of the copyright. 2. No.

Seaforth.—The Manchester Ship Canal was begun (first sod cut at Eastham, by Lord Egerton of Tatton) 11th November, 1889.

Anxious to Know.—You are only responsible for the debts of the deceased to the extent of the property you may have inherited from him.

Lottery.—All lotteries, except art unions constituted in the mode provided by Act of Parliament, are illegal in this country.

Bobby.—A policeman can insist upon a publican taking in a dead body, but no one else can oblige him to do so.

Jubilee.—We do not think Jubilee coins are now in demand, and their price has practically come to their nominal value.

A. P. F.—A person who has been sentenced to penal servitude is not, after his release, deprived of the franchise.

Unhappy Mother.—If you bought out your son from the Army and he enlisted again within a few days, you cannot get back any of the money you paid.

Sairey Gamp.—The law makes no specific provision for the disposal of the wedding-ring of a widow on her death.

Sea.—He can go for the examinations of second mate, but his success or otherwise would greatly depend upon his education. You ask "And what are the usual wages?" Wages for what—boy or mate?

Amy March.—The witnesses to a will must be present and see the testator and each other sign their names.

Jack's Sweetheart.—A domestic servant is entitled to a calendar month's notice, but it may be given at any time.

Pauper.—A distress for rent cannot be made at night. It must be made between the hours of sunrise and sunset.

Scientist.—A letter addressed to Professor Huxley at the Royal Institution, London, would be sure to find him.

Dunce.—According to English numeration there are a million millions in a billion, and a million billions in a trillion.

Ignoramus.—Spring begins on March 20, summer on June 21, autumn on September 23, and winter on December 21.

Jilted.—Such a ring may be recovered, but it is generally considered mean and contemptible to make the attempt.

Anxious Parent.—A boy committed to an industrial school may be detained there for the full term specified in the magistrates' order.

Aster.—The star to which you refer as being visible in the south-east about two-and-a-half hours before sunrise is Venus.

C. E. M.—Royal marines are enlisted like soldiers, but with the special provision that they are to serve in the corps of marines.

Maiden all Forlorn.—Get a policeman to go with you when you demand the restoration of your property, and if it is then refused, charge the party with theft.

Geo.—Upper Burmah was annexed to Great Britain in 1886. Its area, including the tributary Shan States, is estimated at 180,000 square miles.

THE CONQUEROR CONQUERED.

In Southern archipelagos he fought the bloody cannibal;
He skinned and tanned the crocodile and found him very tannable;
Not a word of fear he'd uttered, not a word and not a syllable,
When he killed the Bengal tiger, and he found him very killable.

He claimed his strength was very great, for bears and lions suitable;
He used to boot the grizzly bear, and found him very bootable;
He claimed, in killing monstrous snakes, that he was very capable;
No boa-constrictor could escape, for he was unescapeable.

Just then his wife came in and said, "I'd think it very commendable,
If you'd come and tend the baby; and you'll find him very tendable."
The way she took him by the ear will make this poem readable;
She pulled him out and led him home, and found him very leadable.

Nelly Gray.—The best preparation for the hands at night is the white of an egg with a grain of alum dissolved in it.

Phil.—If they are patent medicines you will require a five-shilling patent-medicine license. If not an ordinary peddler's license will be sufficient.

Laundress.—A little turpentine mixed with the starch will give a finer gloss to shirt bosoms, collars and cuffs.

Fancy Work.—Embroidery in silk, ribbon and gold thread is seen on nearly every article designed for home or personal decoration.

Sorely Tried.—A lead comb is frequently tried and successfully used to darken the colour of hair which happens to be more brilliant than pleasing.

F. U. N.—Never hang a mirror where the sun's rays will strike upon it. It acts on the mercury and clouds the glass.

Rob Roy.—Failing the Prince of Wales and his eldest son (the Duke of Clarence), the next in succession at the present time is Prince George of Wales.

Volunteer.—Some of the most powerful modern cannon are sighted for 8,700 yards, and at that distance may be relied upon to strike an object ten feet high.

A Soldier's Darling.—The reduced rates for letters to soldiers who are serving abroad only applies to letters which are under the weight of half-an-ounce.

Dry as Dust.—Bent whalebones can be restored and used again by soaking them for a few hours in water and then drying them.

An Anxious Mother.—A strip of flannel or napkin folded lengthwise and dipped in hot water and wrung out, and then applied around the neck of a child that has the croup, will usually bring relief in ten minutes.

The Witch of Endor.—The last executions for witchcraft of which we can find any record occurred in Poland, January 17th, 1775, when nine old women were burned at the stake. They were accused of bewitching the land and rendering it unfruitful.

A Would be Recruit.—Enlistment for the Life Guards is always on special conditions, which are advertised at the Post Offices on placards when recruits are wanted.

Agony.—A towel folded several times and dipped in hot water, and quickly wrung and applied over the toothache or neuralgia, will generally afford prompt relief.

Housekeeper.—To prevent brooms from cutting carpets, wet them in boiling suds once a week. The broom, as well as the carpets, will last much longer for it.

One in Doubt.—An executor is not entitled to charge anything for his own services in administering an estate. He can only charge expenses actually out of pocket.

T. Theresa.—A good-tempered, bright-looking young girl. As to character, we cannot tell; but, of course, we conclude good. In reference to your third question, we fear the future is as unreadable to us as to other poor mortals.

Constant Obesity Reader.—We think you might have chosen a more appropriate *nom de plume*. No, to both your questions. To suppose otherwise would be nonsense. As everything else, if too much is eaten, bad effects follow.

A Constant Reader.—The word "Coliseum," which was the name of the great amphitheatre of Vespasian at Rome, is pronounced "*Kol-e-see-um*," with the accent on the first and third syllables. It is also spelled "Colosseum," and is then pronounced "*Kol-os-see-um*."

Mythology.—The name "Niobe" is pronounced "*nigh-o-be*," with the accent on the first syllable; "Penelope" is pronounced "*pe-nell-o-pe*," with the accent on the second syllable; and "Psyche" is pronounced "*sigh-ke*," with the accent on the first syllable.

True Love.—That is a question for your parents to decide, after they learn who the young gentleman is, and what he is. Every such case should be decided, on specific and personal grounds, by the parties who are entitled to control the young lady's actions.

A Sailor's Wife.—There are several peppers—black, white, long Cayenne, Guinea, Jamaica, and cubed. The black is the dried, unripe fruit of a small plant; the white is the ripe, red berry of the same plant skinned before it is dried. White pepper has not the medicinal properties of black, and is not nearly so good a digestive.

Dew.—Dew neither falls nor rises. It is caused by the heated air radiating from the earth being condensed upon the surface by the sudden setting in of a cold atmosphere. Being warm, the air contains a large quantity of moisture, which is deposited the moment the air is chilled.

Forlorn.—We say at once, it is quite impossible for you to obtain certificate of your birth. No doubt it may exist in the private registry of some church, but which one could not be ascertained without ranging through all those existing in Dublin, and searching backwards and forwards through twenty years' records.

Humpty-Dumpty.—The hump on the back of the dromedary is an accumulation of a peculiar species of fat, which is a store of nourishment beneficently provided against the day of want, to which the animal is often exposed. The dromedary or camel can exist for a long period upon this hump without any other food.

Interested.—The claimant calling himself Sir Roger Tichborne was convicted 28th February, 1874. Verdict: That he did falsely swear that he was Sir Roger Charles Tichborne, that he seduced Catherine N. E Doughty in 1851, and that he was not Arthur Orton. Sentence: Fourteen years' imprisonment, with hard labour.

Matrimony.—When the family resemblance is strong between the cousins, when their temperaments and cast of character are similar, a marriage between them is, in the highest degree, unwise. There are cousins, however, who have as little in common with one another as though they were not related. Such might marry, with the best consequences.

Esther.—As a matter of fact, the Queen never puts on any crown from the day she is solemnly decorated with it by the Archbishop until she dies. On special State occasions when the Crown is produced, it is carried upon a cushion by an official. Her Majesty meanwhile wearing a jewelled female headdress. As for her abstract right to put the old thing in the Crown Room at Edinburgh Castle on her head, there can be no doubt about that. It is a Crown-Jewel, and as such belongs to her while she is Queen.

The London Reader, Post-free. Three-halfpence Weekly; or Quarterly One Shilling and Eightpence.

All Back Numbers, Parts and Volumes are in print, and may be had of all booksellers.

NOTICE.—Part 352, Now Ready, price Sixpence, post-free, Eightpence. Also Vol. LV., bound in cloth, 4*s.* 6*d.*

☞ All Letters to be Addressed to the Editor of The London Reader, 334, Strand, W.C.

†‡† We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

London: Published for the Proprietor, at 334, Strand, by J. R. Spence; and printed by Woodfall and Kinder, 70 to 76, Long Acre, W.C.